MANUEL IN MEXICO

LITTLE PEOPLE EVERYWHERE

LITTLE·PEOPLE

MANUEL IN MEXICO
UMÉ SAN IN JAPAN
RAFAEL IN ITALY
KATHLEEN IN IRELAND
FRITZ IN GERMANY
GERDA IN SWEDEN
COLETTE IN FRANCE

EVERYWHERE

BORIS IN RUSSIA
BETTY IN CANADA
DONALD IN SCOTLAND
MARTA IN HOLLAND
HASSAN IN EGYPT
JOSEFA IN SPAIN
CHANDRA IN INDIA

MANUEL IN MEXICO

T. Berton Moore

Christmas 1931.

With love,

Grandma Bailey.

A little Remembrance from the Wichita Conventions.

MANUEL AND BENITO

LITTLE PEOPLE EVERYWHERE

MANUEL IN MEXICO

BY ETTA BLAISDELL McDONALD

AND JULIA DALRYMPLE

Authors of "Umé San in Japan," "Rafael in Italy," "Kathleen in Ireland," etc.

Illustrated

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PREFACE

Mexico is a land flooded with sunshine and decked with flowers. Its scenery is magnificent. Snow-capped mountains rise amid scenes of tropical beauty. The climate varies from that of the torrid zone on the lowlands, to that of regions of perpetual snow on the lofty peaks. Its people are kindly, courteous, and hospitable. It is a land of tradition and romance, and of picturesque contrasts.

Nearly half of the inhabitants of the United States of Mexico are Indians, descendants of the Indian races which were conquered by the Spaniards. Many of them are poor peons who live on the haciendas, tilling the soil for their masters as their fathers and grandfathers have done before them for many generations; but there are those who have become famous men and have accomplished great deeds for their country.

This story tells how Manuel, a little Mexican lad, who begins his life on the hacienda, has an opportunity to go to Mexico City, taking with him his friend Benito. Here the two boys have many interesting adventures and Manuel, at last, realizes his great

ambition of becoming a cadet in the military school of Chapultepec.

In telling the story the most picturesque customs of the people, both in country and city life, have been introduced. On the hacienda one sees the boys playing games and riding burros, the little girls going to school, the peon laborers working in the fields, the women patting tortillas; the simple, daily life of the poor Indians.

In the city is the greatest contrast. Here there are the streets thronged with gaily-dressed people, the markets, the street venders, the parks beautiful with flowers, fountains and electric lights, the canals crowded with flower-laden boats.

Manuel and Benito become pages to a great lady and take part in the Christmas festivities. They learn a little history and see many of the interesting sights in and near Mexico City.

The pronouncing vocabulary at the end of the book will help to make the reading easy for children, and if they live Manuel's life with him for a little while they cannot fail to find a charm in this land of flowers and sunshine and happy childhood.

The authors acknowledge their indebtedness to Mrs. Arthur L. Finney, of Orizaba, for valuable information concerning life and customs in Mexico, and to Mr. William Avery Cary for the use of his photographs.

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MANUEL IN MEXICO

CHAPTER I

MANUEL'S BAND

Nowhere, save among the brown children of Mexico, could ten little boys have gathered so quietly for such a noisy game.

It was Benito who called them together, and Manuel who lined them up against the hacienda wall.

"Vamonos! All aboard, boys!"

The call in Benito's soft Spanish was taken up and echoed by one after another of the band, wherever it found them.

Some of the boys were bouncing ball, others lying idly under the trees. All answered the call and hurried toward the gateway where Manuel and Benito were waiting for them.

There were three who heard as they played leap-frog in front of the blacksmith's forge. They straightened themselves and turned in the direction of the others.

The largest of the three repeated the call, "All aboard, boys!" but he made no move to follow. Instead, he put a hand upon the shoulder of each of his two companions, holding them when they would have run after the others.

His face was heavy and sullen looking, and his voice hard as he said, "Tell me, Pedro, why must we run the moment Benito Diaz calls?"

"Because it is Manuel who wants us," answered Pedro.

"Yes, Juan," spoke the other boy eagerly, "let us hurry! Perhaps Manuel has the burros ready for us."

Juan turned angrily to José. "More likely he will make burros of us, by driving us about," he said. "Let us stay here and play leap-frog as we were doing before Benito called."

"All aboard, boys!" came the call again from the gate, and with an answering call, Pedro and José shook off Juan's hand and ran quickly to join the others, whose voices rose in happy chatter.

Juan, "Black Juan" the boys called him because of his scowling face, followed slowly, kicking little stones out of his path. It was easy to see that there was rebellion in his heart, for his scowl was heavier than usual.

In the meantime, Pedro and José had joined the group by the adobe gateway. "Here we are,"

they said, not to Benito who called them, but to the larger boy who stood outside the gate.

It was Manuel, the leader of the band, who, without waiting for the reluctant Juan, said quietly, "All aboard!" and the nine boys ranged themselves against the high wall.

The bright Mexican sun looked down upon a pleasant scene in that Tlaxcalan valley.

A rolling plain covered with maguey and corn fields stretched away from the white adobe wall. Inside the wall rose the low buildings of the hacienda. Against the wall stood a line of ragged little Mexican Indian boys.

From the foot of the line, to which he had been crowded by the others, Pedro looked far and wide with a disappointed face. "Where are the burros?" he asked.

"Stupid! Who said anything about burros?" asked Benito from the head of the line.

"José," answered Pedro. "José said perhaps Manuel would have the burros ready."

"Manuel would not have them ready; he would tell me, and I would have them ready," said Benito, turning a cart-wheel for joy.

Pedro looked as if he were at his wits' end between disappointment at not seeing the burros and bewilderment at trying to understand Benito's words.

"But if the burros were here," he said, obstinately, "it would be Manuel who would have them here."

"Very well, Stupid," answered Benito, seeing that Pedro thought him of little use except to explain. "The burros have all gone to the station with loads of corn. Manuel could have no burros this morning, so we are going to play Cat and Rat."

Pedro's face grew cheerful at once. Next to burro-riding he liked to be the cat in the game of Cat and Rat. "Let me be the cat," he cried.

"No," said Manuel, "we must count out for it," and he began pointing his finger at one boy after another, saying:

"De una, de dola,
De tela, canela."

The choice fell upon big Pedro to be the rat, and by counting out again little Benito was chosen for the cat. Then the boys formed a ring with the rat inside and the cat outside, and the game began; the cat trying to break the ring and catch the rat.

Juan took his place in sullen silence while all the others scuffled and pushed one another good-naturedly in finding places to their liking.

Benito threw himself again and again upon the clasped hands, but to no purpose. The circle bent

as it swayed back and forth, but it did not break.

Big Pedro watched the struggle with a slow smile on his flat face. Often he said, "Non!" as Benito was pushed back and forth. Sometimes, when the boy almost broke a link in the chain, it would be "Si!" only to be changed to "Non!" again, as the hands tightened and drove Benito back.

No one heard Pedro. The boys were all intent upon the motions of the cat. "Here, old cat, here is a weak place. Try this!" was their shout; but Benito never found it weak enough to break through.

Suddenly the rat could wait for the cat no longer. Pedro gave a roar like a gentle bull and threw himself upon a pair of hands. They fell apart under his weight and left an open space.

"Here, little Benito," he cried, "come quick! Here is a chance for you to catch me!"

But the boys closed upon Benito like bees, and now he was the rat, inside the circle, while Pedro, outside the ring, found himself the cat.

Then it was that Manuel proved his leadership.

Where before there had been only play, everything now became in earnest. The laughing and careless chattering ceased and every boy looked to the leader for directions. There was a pushing together of two slender boys, and a stretching apart

of two sturdy ones. José was changed into Martin's place, and Manuel diverted Pedro's attention while the change was made.

Or, just as Pedro thought himself breaking through, in some way he found himself somewhere else, beginning all over again. There had been a quick signal from Manuel, a sudden clamor from the boys, and the slow-thinking Pedro had been confused.

It was a long game. The moment arrived when he was ready to give up the struggle, but at that moment Juan's treachery gave the battle to him.

Pedro, tired out, threw himself half-heartedly upon Juan's and José's clasped hands. Juan loosened, instead of tightening his hold, and the link broke, the cat jumping upon the rat with a shout.

CHAPTER II

PEDRO RIDES A BURRO

It had been a hard-won victory, but even slow Pedro knew that it was not his.

"It belongs to Manuel," he said. "I would have given up, but Manuel would never have done so."

"That is true," said José. "Juan let go of my hand when Pedro fell upon us."

The boys looked indignantly at Juan. Angry words rose from them all, until the boy, feeling himself in disgrace with the band, turned and skulked away.

But Pedro sprang after him. Pedro was never slow in his anger, and now he had become roused to punish the offender. He threw Black Juan into the dirt, fell upon his body and lifted his fist to strike the boy, when Manuel interfered.

"Use him for your burro, Pedro," he said, "and let him put you down at the blacksmith's forge."

So it came about that Juan found himself doing the very thing he had feared when the game began.

It was a common thing to see one boy play burro

for another, but it was usually as a forfeit, and not as a punishment.

Juan's heart was fierce with anger as he crawled the long distance over the ground between the gate and the forge, carrying Pedro on his back. He could not throw the boy off. When he tried to do so, the band laughed to see Pedro dig his heels into the burro's sides, until Juan was glad to go on. They went past the walls of the great casa, past the church, store, and school-buildings, and past those buildings where the corn and other provisions were stored.

The earth over which he crawled was worn bare with the passing of many feet. Over this earth, rough with pebbles, Juan crawled with his load, while the birds in the trees sang as if in mockery.

A charcoal burner, driving his own heavily-loaded burro through the gate, laughed at the sight and said, "He would make a good match for my old Sancho."

In front of an open doorway an Indian woman crooned a song before her charcoal fire to make the pot boil sooner. Juan thought she sang to shame him.

He would have liked to hide out of sight among the shrubbery by the duck pond, but Pedro drove him on with hard blows from his fist. The other boys called scornful words after him, and their

laughter grew louder as Juan, hot and tired, moved more slowly.

One called above the others, "He is a lepero!" and Manuel, hearing him, interfered once more.

"It is enough," he said in his short way. "He is one of us, and we have no leperos among the band." To Pedro he added, "Let him go."

Pedro sprang to the ground and set the tired boy free.

Juan rose, and so kindly had Manuel said, "He is one of us," that Juan felt a change in his heart. No tramp could have felt more miserable and vengeful than he, while he was crawling as Pedro's burro, but that force in Manuel which held him chief of the band had conquered Juan at last.

It was a master's voice that sentenced him to play the burro. It was a master's voice that called to the best in Juan, when Manuel said quietly, "We have no leperos among the band."

A silence fell upon the boys. In the silence, Juan looked at Manuel and the look was like that of a grateful dog. From that moment he rebelled no more. The sun shone over the hacienda walls and filled his heart with happiness.

Just then the great bell in the tower rang out the hour of noon. The peons crowded through the gate, returning from their labor in the fields, and the boys joined them for their daily lunch.

CHAPTER III

THE CALL OF THE MOUNTAIN

It was a queer-looking group of Indian boys that separated to join their peon fathers at the noon-day lunch.

Not one among them wore a whole garment save Manuel. Thanks to his careful old grandmother, Juana, his blouse and trousers were clean and whole. Thanks to his own pride he wore a sombrero on his head, and that also was clean and whole.

Every Mexican man and boy who can buy or beg one, wears a sombrero. Looking over the ten who made up what was known as "Manuel's Band," its rank showed at once in the pitiful fact that only one other boy beside Manuel wore any part of a sombrero.

That boy was Benito Diaz.

Benito's sombrero, however, was now only the crown of one. It had parted company with its brim many weeks before. Benito's blouse and trousers, also, were torn and weather-worn.

Once in a great while old Juana caught the boy and changed his rags for something clean and whole. Then for a few days he rivalled Manuel in the eyes of the band. He slept at night wrapped in the half of a dirty serape on the floor of his father's hut, where many others also slept.

For his daily food he ate what has been the food of Mexicans for hundreds of years, corn-cake and beans. Instead of corn-cake and beans he called it tortillas and frijoles.

Sometimes he fried his tortillas for himself, sometimes he took them from old Juana's hand, and sometimes he went without.

"It is no matter," he would say merrily, when Manuel offered him a dish of frijoles for dessert, "I am not hungry so long as the sun shines and the earth is covered with flowers."

The Mexican sun is almost always shining, and the Mexican earth covered with beautiful flowers; and, certainly, Benito's laughing face never looked hungry.

Perhaps he was too busy attending to Manuel's wants, ever to know any want of his own. Not that Manuel said much about his wants to Benito, for that would drive the sunshine from his face, and one missed the sunshine when it went from Benito's face.

It was when Manuel lay quietly watching the

clouds drift over the mountain-top, as if he would like to follow after them, that Benito felt the time was ripe to attend to Manuel's wants.

Once or twice, at such times, it happened that Manuel's voice spoke the longing in his eyes.

"On the farther side of the mountain lies the great City of Mexico," he told the wondering Benito. And Benito answered vaguely, "Si, Manuel." He would have said "Yes, Manuel," if the other had told him that George Washington was still alive and lived in a great hacienda on the farther side of the mountain.

So he said, "Si, Manuel," and waited, watching a group of mounted police as they turned and wheeled in the distance.

Manuel continued, "Somewhere near the house of our President there is a school where generals are made. I should like to go to that school."

This was the longing that Benito had seen and puzzled over in the boy's far-away look.

In all Benito's ten years he had never reasoned much, but it did not take him long to come to a conclusion. Manuel's love for fine clothes must be at the bottom of the trouble, he thought. No doubt the bright red serapes worn by the mounted police when they rode over the plains had taken his fancy.

Benito's common sense told him that a boy who owned only half a sombrero could never manage

Burro Carrying a Load of Pottery. *Page* 13.

to find a red serape, so he turned his thoughts to the mounted police.

There were plenty of burros to be had for the asking when they were not carrying the hacienda loads, and there were plenty of boys, children of the peon laborers, to ride them.

Benito decided that Manuel should become a general at once.

That was how it came about that Juan, Pedro, José, Benito, and six other boys, found themselves formed into a sort of company, which became known in time as "Manuel's Band."

Whenever Benito saw Manuel's eyes follow the clouds over the mountain-tops, he called the ten together. They were often to be seen playing Mexican games; leap-frog, known in Mexico as burro-corrido, or the game which the Spaniards carried to Mexico when Cortez conquered the country four hundred years ago, the game of bull fight.

But the game the boys liked best was to mount the burros and gallop out over the plains.

What riders they were! The poor burros hardly knew themselves as they were driven here and there while the boys lassoed one of the band, or tried to pull him from his seat.

It was a life that Benito loved. That which lay beyond the mountain had no interest for him. He never gave it a thought, and little by little it became

his great aim to keep Manuel from thinking of it. Manuel led the band, but Benito led Manuel.

At the railroad station of Santa Ana, three miles away from the hacienda, the train guard called in Spanish, "Vamonos, All aboard!" when it was time for the train to start.

The band took the word for its own use. "Vamonos!" Benito's soft voice would call, and the boys' bare feet would run from the far corners of the hacienda enclosure to the spot where Manuel waited for them.

"All aboard!" he would say quietly from under his sombrero, and they would range themselves along the high wall.

The great Spaniard, Cortez, when he took away their liberty, took everything else from the people of Mexico. He tore down the wonderful palaces and temples, where monarchs had held royal court, and laid out great farms. On these farms, or haciendas as they are called, the Mexican Indians work to-day. These humble Indians are the descendants of a race that was once among the proudest on the earth.

The hacienda where Manuel and his ten playmates lived belonged to Don Felipe Gomez.

At the time this hacienda was built, four hundred years before, the Spaniards were still fighting to establish themselves in the country. To secure

themselves from the attacks of the Indians they built great walls all around the settlement of houses, forming a protected village.

This was also a village for protection. At night anyone within sound of the great bell in the tower could enter the enclosure and find hospitality in the casa, where there was always food and a bed for the traveller.

Outside the walls, between the little village and the distant snow-covered mountains, were low hills and long valleys. Hundreds of acres of pulque plants and corn dotted these hills.

Mile after mile stretched away before the white mountains lifted their peaks and yet Manuel's eyes seldom rested before they reached the mountain-tops.

Benito could never understand why the boy must always look so high. "See, Manuel," he would urge, "from the very gateway there begins a pleasant path for your feet. Here are more flowers on the ground than there are stars in the sky."

But Manuel would answer, "We can always have flowers for the picking, but to get to the stars one must climb to the mountain-top."

"Of course, Stupid," Benito would reply, "there is no other way." But for the life of him he could not see why Manuel should want stars when there were so many flowers.

Every event, big or little, that made up the daily life of the hacienda, was to Benito like the picking of flowers.

First, there was the ringing of the bell in the tower. At the sound, all the peons took their way in a long slow procession through the gate and went to their work in the fields. There were hundreds of these men whose fathers and grandfathers before them had answered to the sound of the same bell.

After the long procession had passed, there were the many industries of the hacienda to interest the boy. There was the blacksmith's forge with its never idle smith, and the store where there was always an Indian buying or selling, an Indian coming or going to his home on the mountain.

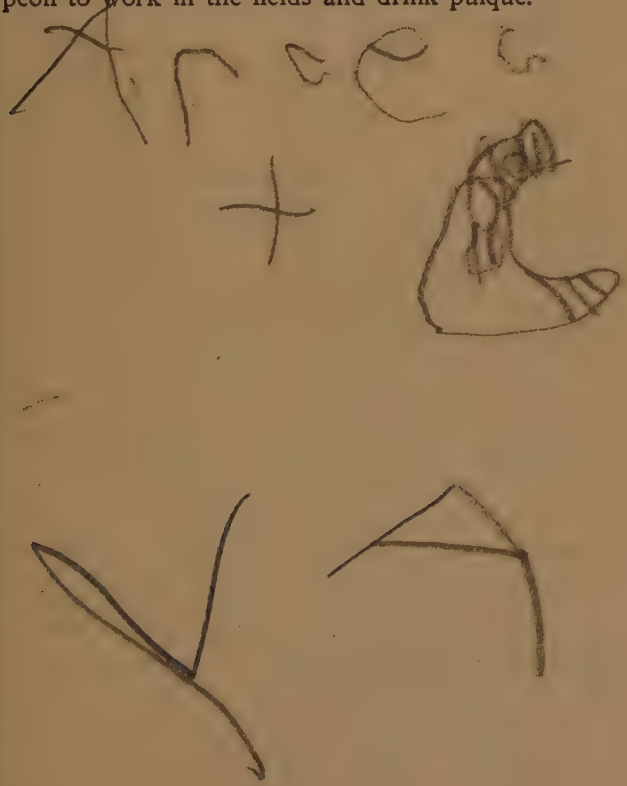
Then there was the church with its open door, and the school; but Benito seldom went near the school. In fact, he said he would never go there if he could help it. It was a good enough place for little girls, with their skirts to their heels, their hair braided and tied with red tape and covered with a reboso. They were well out of the way from early morning until night in just such a place.

Benito sometimes held Manuel still outside the door to listen to the sound of their study. Then, after a moment, the two would creep silently away, knowing very well that unless they chose to go to

the school themselves, they too must soon join the long procession that passed through the gate to go to work in the fields.

It was the dread of just such a future that turned Manuel's eyes to the mountain-top and his longing thoughts to the great city and the military school.

At times he doubled his fists and said to himself, "It shall never be! I will die before I will become a peon to work in the fields and drink pulque."



CHAPTER IV

DONNA HULITA'S BOOK

One day Manuel read the story of Benito Juarez. It was a strange way in which he found the book that told the life of that wonderful Indian.

The great casa where Don Felipe lived was seldom open to the children of the peons. The servants of the household lived within the casa and mingled but little with those outside.

One day, when the great doors happened to be opened wide, Manuel looked through and saw the fountain playing in the patio in the center. It was as if he were suddenly lifted to the mountain-top and found it within his power to pass down on the other side.

Without waiting a moment he slipped through the portal and stood among the beautiful flowers and fruit trees. It was another world to Manuel, but he had always been sure that there was such a world.

Columns twined with flowers formed arcades about the patio. Looking through the arcades he saw beautiful rooms opening inward into the house.

He walked boldly into the most beautiful of these rooms and found himself looking into Donna Hulita's face. Donna Hulita was Don Felipe's wife, and seldom spoke to the children of the peons, but she spoke to Manuel.

Perhaps the boy's clean blouse attracted her. Perhaps she liked the graceful way in which he took his sombrero from his head and held it while he looked at her. Perhaps she could not help herself, for he was very handsome. He held his head straight and looked at her as proudly as if he were really a general.

"Buenos dias!" said she.

Manuel answered with the same softly spoken words, "Good morning, Señora," and never took his eyes from her face. Donna Hulita was the handsomest lady he had ever seen, the handsomest and the proudest.

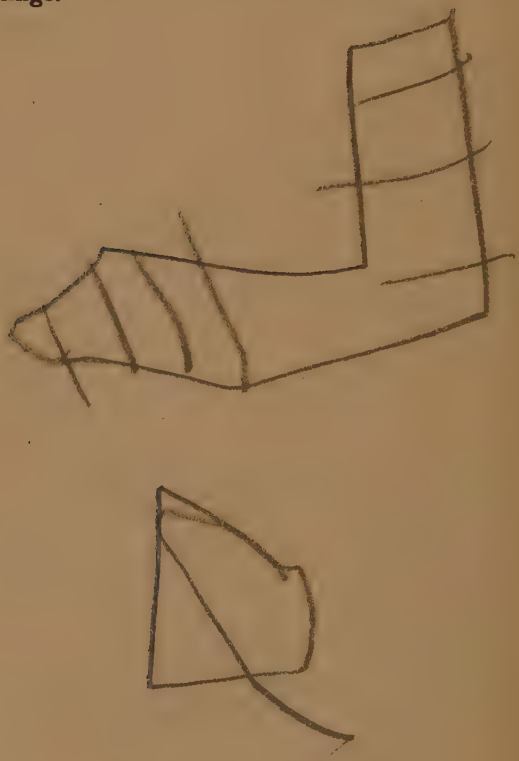
She asked him many questions,—his name, his age, and in which hut his father and mother lived.

He answered briefly, as a don would have done. His father had never been seen since the day he brought Manuel, a tiny baby, and placed him in Grandmother Juana's arms. His mother died when he was a baby, up among the mountains where she lived with her own people. She had never seen Don Felipe's hacienda.

Donna Hulita listened to what he said and

looked at him a long time in silence. At last she took a little book from the table. "Take this," she said, "and when you have read it bring it back to me again."

Then she sent him away, back to the band with its games and burro-riding, back to his mountain-gazing. But he took the book with him, and it led to many things.



CHAPTER V

BENITO JUAREZ

Manuel went to find Benito as soon as he left Donna Hulita and the casa.

"Look!" he said, opening the book before the boy's wondering eyes. "We must learn to read."

Benito looked the book well through before he said anything. In one of the pictures was a man on horseback, in several others were guns and the smoke of guns. Benito looked at the pictures with pleased eyes.

"They are good to see," he said at last, "but the wooden bench in the school is not good to feel all day."

"There is no other way," said Manuel briefly.

"Of course there isn't," said Benito crossly. "If one would get words out of a book, he must go into the school; but he would die before many days." Then the thought came to him that the bottom of the duck pond was a good place for the mischievous book.

He urged Manuel to throw it into the water. Manuel shook his head and took the book away

from him. "Will you come also to the school?" he asked.

"No, I will not," declared Benito stoutly, and he warned Manuel that everything would go wrong as soon as he learned to read.

Manuel, however, hunted up kind-hearted little Pepita and asked if she could read the book to him. But Pepita had been only three weeks in school herself, and half that time had been spent in crying. She was only five years old, and the wooden bench felt so hard that some days she sat most of the time on the floor.

"Don't go to the school," she said to Manuel. "It is bad for the eyes to cry so much."

Manuel, boy that he was, felt a man's pity for the little maid's trouble, but a boy's scorn for her pity for him. He told her that he should surely go to the school until he could read Donna Hulita's book, and then she offered him the use of her slate and pencil.

"Of what use is something else?" he asked her. "It is the book I must read."

"There are signs that you must make all day on the slate, when you are not reading," answered little Pepita.

Manuel drew a long breath and looked at the mountain-top. So going to school was one way that led to the stars.

He made up his mind that he would make signs until the teacher's eyes should ache for their number, and he would learn to read.

He said nothing to old Juana, but took his place on the wooden bench and held his slate and pencil as the little girls held theirs, and made the signs. But he found to his surprise that each sign held a meaning, and the days were not so long as he had feared they would be.

He saw Benito outside the door. After a few days he seldom looked that he did not see the boy busily marking in the sand at first; later he was fashioning with his hands little figures in clay.

One day Manuel found that while he had been inside, learning to read, Benito, outside, had made the whole school-room scene in clay. There were the blackboard, study-desks, benches and teacher's table in the scene. Yes, and there in one corner stood Manuel himself in the dunce's place.

Benito's skilful fingers had done the work of an artist.

Manuel laughed with pleasure, but he said to the boy, "I am no dunce, Benito. The teacher told me to-day that I am learning to read with great speed." Then he turned his eyes upon his friend. "You, Benito, might become a great artist in Mexico City."

Benito suddenly spoke out crossly, saying, "I do not wish to become anything but your playmate

once more, and how can we be playmates if we do not play together?"

Manuel could say nothing to comfort him then, but the day came when at last he finished reading the book, and went to Benito with kindling eyes.

"It is the story of a great man, Benito Juarez," he told the boy. "He was an Indian boy as poor as we are. He wore ragged clothes, and no sombrero, and he studied. He learned to read and he became, as President Porfirio Diaz did also, one of the greatest men in Mexico!"

Benito looked at Manuel and felt the fire of his spirit. "Where did he live when he was a little boy?" he asked.

"Down in the south of Mexico," said Manuel, and repeated, "He was an Indian boy as poor as we are, and he wore ragged clothes!"

Benito caught Manuel's thought. "What shall you do?" he asked softly.

"I shall do what Donna Hulita tells me to do," said Manuel. "I am going to the casa and ask to see her." But Donna Hulita was not there. She had gone over the mountain to Mexico City, and there was nothing for Manuel to do but wait for her return.

CHAPTER VI

JUANA'S BEDSTEAD

Benito was happy once more. He spirited Manuel away from school and the two boys galloped out over the plain on their burros.

"Did you learn nothing but Benito Juarez in the school?" asked the boy Benito curiously, as they stopped their burros by the wall that ran beside the great maguey field.

Manuel laughed. "No, I learned that in the country to the north of ours there are people who never saw a burro," he answered.

Benito looked as if he thought Manuel had suddenly lost his wits.

"That cannot be," he said. "No country could get along without burros." But Manuel insisted that it was true.

"Then," said Benito, when at last he was convinced, "I am willing to cross the mountain with you and see the world, if it is such a queer world that burros have not travelled over the whole of it."

"Look!" said Manuel suddenly, pointing to a peon who was beating an overburdened little ani-

mal among the pulque plants. "His burro is more of a man than he is. That is what we Indian boys must become if we stay here,—a beast like cruel Sancho."

"Well," said Benito carelessly, "if it is the custom, what is to be done about it?"

"If I were the President," said Manuel, "I would do something about it. I would begin by stopping all pulque from being made."

"Good!" said Benito. "Then we should have the more flowers."

Benito was right. The flower of the pulque plant is not allowed to blossom. If it should, there would be no pulque, and pulque is the national drink of Mexico.

It was little José who said one time, "If I can have a sombrero, a pulque plant, and a burro, when I am a man, I shall be rich enough."

The boys were shivering with the cold when he said it, but Benito was the only one who thought to say, "I would rather have a serape now."

A Mexican man can wrap himself in his serape when he is cold; but few children of the peons can own one. The serape is used as a shawl by day and a blanket by night, but as not one of the band owned such a thing, they had to get along as well as they could without it.

As Manuel and Benito sat on their burros beside

the pulque field, the sun beat down upon them so fiercely that it was hard to believe that they could ever be cold in Mexico.

Suddenly, in the distance, they heard the merry shouts of the boys.

Pedro and the others had discovered their absence and were galloping toward them, mounted also on burros.

"Let us hide!" said Benito, always ready for excitement. Slipping from their animals, they drew into the shelter of a few tangled bushes growing by the roadside.

The band drew nearer, sitting their burros as if they were wild horses of the plains. At the bushes they stopped so suddenly that there would have been broken bones, had they not been Indian boys, who had ridden on burros almost ever since they were babies.

Pedro peered anxiously about. "Where have they gone?" he asked fretfully, just as Juan's sharper eyes discovered the two boys.

If Pedro's voice had not been so soft, the cry that he gave on seeing Manuel once more among them, would have been a war-whoop.

"Come over to the station," he urged. "There is a train-load of pilgrims going to Sacra Monte."

Immediately the boys were off again, Benito and Manuel among them, in the direction of Santa

Ana; but they were destined not to reach the little station that day.

Beyond the maguey field a mangy dog ran beside the road. One of the boys threw his lasso at the dog, but it coiled about the feet of Benito's burro instead. The little animal doubled up and rolled to the ground with his rider underneath.

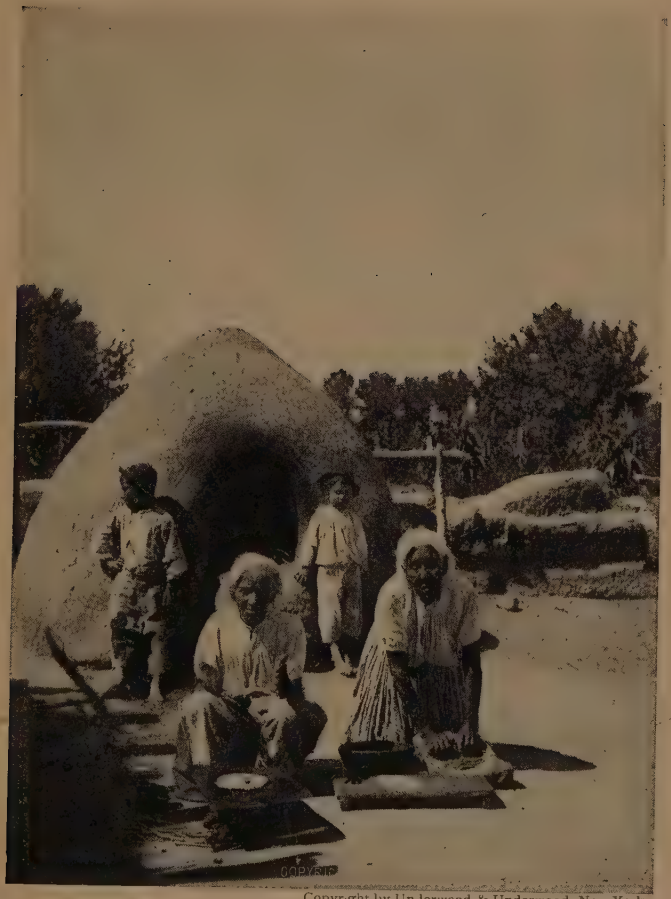
All the boys immediately jumped off their burros and gathered around the fallen one, who did not stir when they called to him.

Manuel stood above him with a frightened face and directed the band. "You, Juan, must ride ahead and find the doctor," he said. "You, José, go to Grandmother Juana and tell her to get the bedstead ready. You, Pedro, must help me lift Benito on to the burro."

Pedro could not have lifted the boy alone without hurting him, but together he and Manuel put Benito carefully upon the burro's back, and then they started slowly for the hacienda. The others rode ahead with José to give Manuel's message to the old Indian woman.

They found her in front of the great oven with her neighbor Maria, making tortillas and frying them over a little charcoal fire. She looked at the boys in surprise as they clattered along the ground and stopped in a group before her.

"You must get the bedstead ready for Manuel,



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Old Juana Making Tortillas. *Page* 28.

he wishes to put Benito on it so that the doctor may look at him," said José very loudly, for old Juana was quite deaf.

"Benito is very sick," shouted one of the boys, seeing that she did not comprehend.

"That is what I always said," nodded the old woman. "His clothes have holes in them always. I said he would be sick."

"No, no!" shouted another boy. "He has been hurt. The doctor is coming and you must put him on your bedstead."

"The doctor must see my bedstead!" said Juana. "That is good. It is a fine bedstead."

They tried again, and at last she understood; but she shook her head and said, "No, it can never be. No one has ever lain upon the bedstead since it was put into my hut."

"Benito must lie there," shouted José. "Manuel says so."

"But it is not the custom," answered the old woman. "I cannot permit it, because we Indians always sleep on the floor."

José begged, but Juana's head shook steadily. "It is no use," she said, "because my fiesta clothes are on the bedstead. He must lie on the floor. It is the place for the son of a peon."

When Manuel arrived she pointed to a clean mat placed on the hard floor at the foot of the bed-

stead. "Put him there," she said. But Manuel put the fiesta clothes on the mat, and between them, he and Pedro put Benito on the bedstead.

The doctor arrived at the same time. He looked the child over and found that he had a broken ankle and must be kept perfectly still.

"Leave him on the bedstead," commanded the doctor, and added, "I will come again when he opens his eyes."

Benito's eyes opened after a couple of hours, but Manuel was the only one with sense enough to run to tell the doctor of it.

He came again, felt all Benito's bones, wrapped his broken ankle in bandages, gave medicine, and ordered the boy to lie on the bedstead for three weeks.

"Afterwards," said the doctor with a wave of his hand, "he will be the same as always."

Poor old Juana saw it all, was told what the doctor said, and became quite dazed. Benito might be the same as always, she thought, but how about the bedstead!

It had never been used since Don Felipe's mother gave it to her one time when house-cleaning was going on up at the great casa. A most beautiful spring and mattress came with it. Juana stood the bedstead in the corner of her hut and hung her choicest pieces of pottery above it on the wall.

At night, she lay down on the floor beside it, wrapped in a warm serape. Nothing but the fiesta clothes had ever been allowed to lie upon it. If a peon's child were to lie upon it for three weeks it could never be the same again! She was in despair.

Manuel paid no attention to her complainings, but when night came he fried tortillas for her over the charcoal fire.

Her heart softened at the sight. No one had ever done it for her before. "But it is not the custom," she said faintly.

Manuel leaned against her with his arm about her neck, his young cheek against her old one. He said nothing, but there was no need that he should. She was quite ready to let him have his way.

Later, after Benito got well and left the bedstead, Manuel insisted that she should sleep upon it, and in her old heart Juana was glad to let him have his way.

CHAPTER VII

TORTILLAS AND TOMATO SAUCE

Benito, lying upon the bedstead, watched Manuel who sat on the step in the open doorway. Manuel had collected a great quantity of feathers from the hens and roosters. He was tying these feathers to the end of a long slender bamboo stick to make a duster.

His fingers needed to work with great skill to make the feathers fast to the stick, else they slipped off and he had to begin his work all over again.

"Look at him work, he must have a humming-bird in his belt," said Benito with a pleased laugh, as Manuel started his task for the third time.

Manuel laughed also to hear Benito's tongue repeat the good old Mexican proverb. "You can say nothing, lazy Benito," he answered. "When you have lain on the bedstead one more week, you will need a humming-bird in your own belt to make you work."

Benito had already lain on the bed two weeks, and to his own great surprise, found himself still alive. At the time they told him that he must lie

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The House Where Benito Lived. *Page* 33.

there three weeks he thought that the second week would surely find him dead, and it filled him with no end of astonishment that the days went by quickly and pleasantly.

Perhaps the reason was that for the first time in his life he found himself a person of importance. Not only did Manuel and Grandmother Juana wait upon him, but the boys of the band brought little gifts to him, and the peon men and women stopped to greet him as they went to work in the fields.

In the house where his father lived, Benito was only one of twenty. Men, women and children shared with him the dirty little room they called a home. Nor was that all,—a flock of hens nested wherever there was a convenient place, usually in the bin of corn that filled one corner.

Benito's father stopped with the other peons to speak to the boy, and it was hard to believe that the child was the son of such a man.

The father was one of those peons, that to Manuel seemed more like a beast than the burro he drove. Benito, on the contrary, had a gentle, delicate face, like that of the flowers he loved. His eyes held the sunshine of both flowers and sky when the Mexican sun shines brightest. His heart held nothing but love, yet he loved best that which is sweet and clean.

That was why he stayed so little near the dirt and

misery of his father's house, and so much of the time near Manuel, at old Juana's place. He had no mother. Perhaps that was why the old woman made an effort now and then to dress him in clean clothes; and also why she allowed him to stay on the precious bedstead after Manuel had put him there so carefully.

One could hardly say how it happened that old Juana was neat and thrifty. She was noted all over the hacienda for her tidy house, her neat person and her fine flock of hens.

The other Indian women envied her the house and the hens, but Juana told them they might have hens just as fine as hers if they would only hang baskets from the lower branches of the trees. Then the hens would have a place to roost at night, where nothing could disturb them.

As for the house, there were plenty of colored pictures at the store to be had for the asking. She always asked for the tomato-can labels herself, because they were the brightest.

Benito, from his bed, studied the many labels tacked on the walls, until he knew everything about them except the words. Then he asked Manuel to teach the words to him, which Manuel was glad enough to do at the times when none of the band interrupted.

The band often came in a body to eat supper by

Benito's bedside and chatter about the many things that had happened through the day in the hacienda.

At such times they sat cross-legged in a circle on the floor. Each boy had a little pile of tortillas and a dish of tomato sauce on the floor in front of him. They all took a tortilla in their fingers at the same moment, dipped it in the sauce at the same moment, and ate it greedily.

Benito laughed at the sight, and Pedro looked to see why the boy was laughing. He saw nothing funny about it; the peons always ate with their fingers. He got slowly to his feet and gave a cake to the boy on the bed.

"Eat it," he said. "When you, also, are eating, it will no longer look funny to you."

"It is good to hear him laugh," said Juan, and would have said more, but old Juana spoke from the doorway.

"It is not the custom for a peon to eat in bed," she said, "but it seems that all our customs in Mexico are changing."

Manuel took her by the hand and drew her into a chair near the circle of boys. There were few good chairs in the peons' quarters, but old Juana had one.

"Tell us about some of the customs in Mexico when you were a girl," he shouted in her ear.

The boys hushed their chatter and waited for

her to collect her thoughts. As the old woman looked at their dusky faces, gleaming in the dark shadows of the little room, and saw the quiet figure stretched out on the bed, something sent her thoughts back through the years.

Her look grew strange and her eyes left the eager faces of the boys. Turning them to the open door she fixed them on the distant mountain, and then on the valley below, where the rising moon was casting black shadows.

At last her voice rose solemnly, and it seemed to the boys that she might be one of the noble Indian race that peopled Mexico before the Spaniards conquered the country.

"Over the old highway that runs between the two great volcanoes, Popocatapetl and Ixtaccihuatl, I have seen the Spanish and the French flying in fear before our Indians," she said.

The boys knew that the old highway of which she spoke led from the coast on the Gulf of Mexico to Mexico City, and they had heard that the armies passing over it in former years were some of the finest the world has ever known.

That old Juana had seen actual fighting in her young days filled the boys with awe. Her words conjured up a picture in their minds of the splendor of the Indian nation, from which they themselves were descended.

Their young blood was stirred at the thought of the noble palaces and temples which might have belonged to their own race had the Spanish conqueror never landed upon the soil of Mexico, the soil their fathers tilled for Don Felipe.

Pedro half rose to his feet, about to start forth to crush that hateful Spaniard, wherever he might be, but old Juana was speaking once more.

"Spanish, French, and American;— they have all gone," she said in a prophetic voice, "and the Mexican people has come into its heritage at last."

She brought her eyes back to the tense faces of the boys. "There are three names to remember," she said; "that of Miguel Hidalgo, who struck the first blow for Mexican independence; Benito Juarez, who established it; and Porfirio Diaz, who taught us how to preserve it."

In the silence that followed her words, Pedro sat back contentedly. "This independence that you speak of," he said in a great shout, "is it something for us all?"

She nodded. It seemed that she was tired, for she said nothing more, and there was quiet in the hut for many minutes.

CHAPTER VIII

MANUEL, THE TEACHER

Manuel, at last, took up old Juana's words. "In the school," he said, "the teacher told us many things. She is a person who has travelled to that country where the Spaniards live when they are at home."

But Pedro interrupted to ask, "Have they a country of their own?"

"Yes," answered Manuel, "and there they live in very proud houses, such as our President has. They knew many things four hundred years ago that our Indians did not know. Besides, all the tribes of Indians were not against them. The Spaniards forced our own tribe, the Tlaxcalan Indians, to help them with their plans."

Pedro became indignant. "Such Indians should have been punished as traitors," he said hotly. But Manuel shook his head.

"There were many different tribes of Indians then," he said, "just as there are now; but they were enemies. Now all the tribes are banded together to help each other."

"Is that why we are called the 'United States of Mexico'?" asked José.

"Yes," answered Manuel.

"How did our Indians help Cortez?" asked Pedro.

"They built boats for Cortez and carried them over the mountains to the lake near Mexico City. This was the capital city of the Aztec tribe which Cortez wished to conquer."

Pedro looked at Manuel in amazement to hear him state such a monstrous fact so quietly. "It was a shameful thing for Cortez to force his way into a country where he was not wanted," he declared. "The Aztecs were a noble race. I have heard it said that they were very brave and strong."

Manuel smiled. "The teacher said that it was all in the way of progress," he answered. "The Aztecs conquered the people who were here before them, and they believed a stranger was to come who would teach them many new things."

"How do you know that there were people here before the Aztecs?" asked José.

"Because there are ruins of temples still standing, which neither the Aztecs nor the Spaniards built," answered Manuel.

"Where are they?" asked Benito from the bed.

"There are some down in Oaxaca where Benito Juarez was born," said Manuel. "They are called

the ruins of Mitla and they were built so strongly that no earthquake has ever shaken them down."

Pedro looked his astonishment that such things had never been told to him before.

Manuel continued, "Near the City of the Angels there is a great pyramid, upon which stood a temple, which the Aztecs found when they went to build the City of Mexico. Cortez destroyed the temple and built a Spanish cathedral in its place."

"Ah," said Pedro, "that Cortez was certainly a bad man, no matter what you say."

Manuel laughed again. "The teacher said the Spaniards did much for Mexico in the way of progress," he repeated. "They built many cities, and perhaps if it had not been for them we should not have become the United States of Mexico, with our beautiful flag and our good president."

"Yes, it is a beautiful flag," said Pedro, "and we can never forget the Aztecs while we keep their eagle flying on it."

The eagle that Pedro spoke of, keeps fresh in the Mexican mind the story of the wanderings of the Aztec people when they were looking for a place to build their capital city. For more than seven hundred years they had been journeying from place to place; but at last they received a sign that they were to wander no more.

They reached the shores of a beautiful lake,

and there, on a small island, they saw an unusually large and splendid eagle. It stood poised upon a plant of prickly cactus, with its wings outspread toward the rising sun, and in its beak it held a serpent.

The Aztecs accepted the sign, built the city, which is near the City of Mexico, beside the lake, and took the eagle for their emblem. To-day it flies upon the red, white and green of the Mexican flag.

It was not strange that Pedro felt his heart beat faster when he thought of the flag. "No one shall ever take it away from us again," he said. He stood as he spoke, and looked as if he wished some one would dare to try it that very minute. He felt strong enough to conquer a whole army.

Juan moved in his chair. He had caught some of Pedro's spirit. "What about Hidalgo, of whom Grandmother Juana spoke first?" he asked.

"He was a priest, and he made plans to lead an armed force against the Spaniards, but his plans were all found out before he was ready to strike.

"He heard of the discovery of his plans at eleven o'clock, on the night of the fifteenth of September, 1810. Although he knew that he would very likely be killed in the end, he had the church bells rung, and when all the people ran out of their houses, he met them with a gun in one hand and a torch in

the other, crying, 'Long live America, and death to bad government!'"

"Oh, I know those words!" cried little José. "It is 'The Grito.' There is more to it, and our President says the words from the palace where he lives, at just that same time in the evening, every year, on the fifteenth of September. But I did not know why he says it."

"Was Hidalgo killed?" asked Juan.

"Yes, in the very next year he was betrayed, captured and beheaded. But the teacher said he had started a fire that was never allowed to die out."

"I should like to have fought with him," said Juan.

"There was one peon who became noted for what he did for Hidalgo and Mexico," said Manuel. "There was a great building in one of the cities, and Hidalgo felt that he must capture it, but it was filled with Spaniards who fought him back when he tried to break down the door.

"Hidalgo called for some one who would be willing to risk his life and set fire to the door. A peon offered to do it. He took a great flat stone from the mountain-side and held it over his back so that nothing thrown down upon him from above could hurt him. Then he carried a fire-brand to the doors and set them afire.

"They burned, and Hidalgo was able to get

inside with his men and force the Spaniards to surrender."

Juan gave a shout for the peon, and it roused old Juana. "What did you say?" she asked.

"Manuel has been telling us what he learned in the school," he shouted in answer.

She looked at him with a startled face. "When did Manuel go to the school?" she asked quickly.

Manuel had never told her that he was going to school, because he did not think there was any need of it. He had always spent his days as he pleased, and he was surprised to see old Juana's look of dismay when he told her now that he had been to the school and learned to read.

"It was a bad thing to do," she said.

"Yes," said Benito, "I told him so myself before he went, but it has turned out all right, for he will tell us much that we ought to know."

Old Juana looked at Manuel strangely, then she went out of the little room to wander under the stars and think by herself.

The boys also went out, one by one, through the doorway to their cheerless quarters. No Mexican ever speaks of his house as a home, but Juana's clean little room with the bright colored labels stuck over the walls was more like a home, with its atmosphere of love, than any other in the hacienda.

CHAPTER IX

JUANA'S MEMORIES

When old Juana went back into the room she found both the boys fast asleep. She stood for a long time looking down upon the dark form of Manuel. The moonlight streamed across the floor and touched his strong face, making him look older than he was, because of the shadows.

Was it only ten years ago, she thought, that she took him from his handsome father and promised to bring him up to be a peon laborer?

The boy was wrapped in a serape of many bright colors. His head lay upon a straw mat, and the sight of him was good to old Juana's eyes. She thought of the many times that she had stood so and looked down at him, and her heart grew warm.

"It is of no use," she muttered at last. "I shall have to tell him. He is different from the others, and he will surely find it out for himself."

She went into the farthest corner of the room, where she lay down in her own blanket, but not to sleep. Her mind followed step by step the long years of her life, and the many strange sights she had seen.

In her youth she had been in the midst of fight-

ing and bloodshed, and she could have told the boys of many lawless acts that had taken place on the road over which they scampered on the backs of their burros.

Three times in one day had Don Felipe's father been robbed by bandits between the hacienda and the place where the station stood. It had needed just such an iron hand as that of Porfirio Diaz to crush the spirit of lawlessness that raged for years in Mexico.

The Indians had been bad, but the white men had also done cruel things. She repeated to herself the words of an old saying, "The whiter the face, the blacker the heart."

"It is true!" she muttered in anger. "The soil of Mexico would cry out in a frenzy if it could speak of the horrible things that have been done in this beautiful country."

Benito stirred on his bedstead, and called in his sleep for Manuel. The name carried the old woman's thoughts to happier things. There lay the child who had come into her life on the very day of her return from the great Indian fair at Amecameca, ten years ago.

She had bought the serape which he was wearing now from a Saltillo Indian at that fair. It was one of her few treasures, but it pleased her to see it now on the boy. If he had been her own

child she could not have loved him more fondly.

She smiled grimly in the dusk of the room when she remembered that at first she had refused to take him from the handsome Spaniard. She had said that she was too old to have the care of a helpless baby.

The journey to the fair had been long and hard, and she was tired when she reached the hacienda and said that she should never go again. Just then the stranger stood suddenly before her, as if he had been dropped from the skies, and asked her to keep the child which he held in his arms.

"It is a crazy thought," she had said. "How can you think of asking an old woman to take a baby to bring up? Besides, it is not the custom."

But it had been of no use. The Spaniards were always a masterful race, and in the end he wheedled the child into her arms, where it stayed. Then he went away, and the rest of the story was as Manuel had told it to Donna Hulita.

As soon as her old bones were rested from her long journey to the fair, she found that a little baby in her room added greatly to its appearance.

However, as soon as the baby could roll, he took matters into his own hands by rolling through the doorway and out of doors, where he spent the rest of his days, until Donna Hulita sent him over the mountain.

Old Juana, lying on the floor with open eyes, could not look far enough into the future to see Donna Hulita doing such a thing. She could only see that when the very next day dawned she must tell Manuel his story, no matter what happened.

She told him while she patted her tortillas for breakfast. Being so early in the morning, it was cold, and Manuel shivered as he listened to her words and the monotonous sound made by the soft patting of the cakes from one hand to the other.

If Benito, listening from his bed, had not known the sound so well, he might have thought that all the peon mothers in the hacienda were slapping their babies for the day. But Benito knew the sound, and he knew also that Mexican mothers do not slap their babies. They tie them in the rebosos on the backs of the older sisters, and so dispose of them for hours at a time.

Many years after that morning, in a far-away city where mothers are less tender-hearted, Benito heard the sound of a mother slapping a child, and there flashed into his memory the scene of that early morning in Mexico. He saw again the open door, the charcoal fire outside, and an Indian woman beside it slapping cakes from one hand to the other, while a handsome boy stood before her, his face tense with feeling.

CHAPTER X

DONNA HULITA'S CALL

As the old woman finished her story, the great gates of the hacienda were suddenly thrown open and Don Felipe's finest pair of horses was driven through, bringing Donna Hulita from Mexico City.

Manuel looked from the old woman to the carriage of the younger one. He felt that in some way his life was to be changed, and he shivered again with excitement. Nevertheless, the tortillas tasted very good as he ate them by Benito's bedside and talked old Juana's story over with his friend.

Benito watched Manuel's eyes and for once forgot about the band. He, also, felt that their life was to be different. His own eyes suddenly blurred with tears. "I am only a stupid boy," he said, "and have never cared because things were not different, but if you go away to hunt for a father, or anything like that, I shall die."

Manuel put his head on the bed beside Benito's. "You stupid Benito," he said, "you are always going to die. But if you do, I am going to die, too.

I can do without a father, but I could do nothing without you."

Then, boy-like, the two began to build air-castles.

"We will make many feather brushes," said Manuel, "which we will take to the market in Puebla. There we can get enough money for them to carry us to Mexico City."

Benito's eyes sparkled. "I have heard that the angels helped to build the city of Puebla," he said.

"It is true," answered Manuel, who of course, believed the story. "That is why it is called 'The City of the Angels.'"

"Ah," said Benito, with a mighty sigh, "it will be good to sell feather brushes there."

"After we get to Mexico City," continued Manuel, "we can black shoes until we have earned many pesos, then we can buy some fine clothes and work in an office."

Benito knocked his head affectionately against Manuel's. "You will think of nothing but fine clothes, old Manuelito," he said.

For a moment longer they lay with their heads together, and that was the way Donna Hulita found them when she knocked at the open door.

Manuel went to the door and greeted her quietly enough, but his heart beat its way into his throat.

"Buenos dias, what a very pleasant room," said Donna Hulita.

"It is yours, if you like," answered Manuel, and placed Juana's good chair for her to sit in.

Old Juana also offered the room and everything in it to her visitor, when she found that Donna Hulita thought the pictures of the red tomatoes very attractive.

Many things are done in Mexico which are not according to custom, nowadays, old Juana would say, but there is one custom in that country which never varies. When one Mexican admires something which belongs to another, he is told with great politeness that it is his.

At the time Grandmother Juana accepted the baby as a part of her daily life she spoke to all her friends among the peon women and told them there was a little peon at their service in her house. So are they always courteous among themselves as well as to their masters. And, on the other hand, masters and mistresses treat their servants with the same courtesy.

When old Juana offered her tomato labels to Donna Hulita, she did not think that the great lady would carry them home with her. Donna Hulita understood. She would do the same thing herself, should a visitor admire the beautiful paintings on the walls of her casa. It is the pleasant way of opening a call in Mexico.

But this morning Donna Hulita was not really

making a call. She had come on very important business.

She asked for Manuel's story, and Juana could not help thinking how fortunate it was that she had told it to Manuel already, for Donna Hulita had come to take the boy from the little home of Juana's making to something very grand in the City of Mexico.

Don Felipe's father, Señor Gomez, lived in Mexico City, and Donna Hulita found, while on her visit, that his wife had taken a fancy to have another page in her service. Donna Hulita had never forgotten the handsome boy who stood so unexpectedly before her one day. She told Señora Gomez about him and promised to send the boy to her.

There was another thought also in Donna Hulita's mind. There was a look in Manuel's face which reminded her of some one who had once been very dear to Señora Gomez, but of whom nothing had been heard for many years. She wondered if Señora Gomez would see the same look.

Donna Hulita wished to have the boy start at once. One of the hacienda overseers was going to Mexico City by train that very day, and Manuel might go with him, she said.

Donna Hulita had never had any other way than

her own before, but she did not have it with Manuel.

"I could not go away and leave Benito on the bedstead," he said very gently indeed. Then he added, "I do not wish to leave Benito at all."

Something in old Juana's face, also, made him go to her and put his hand into hers. "Do you wish me to stay here with you?" he asked.

Old Juana did not forget to be polite. "If Donna Hulita wishes it," she said in a voice that shook, "it is to be permitted."

Then the lady looked at Benito. "What do you say, Benito?" she asked.

Benito's face flushed. In his mind he had seen the picture of Manuel and himself at work side by side as they had often ridden side by side, in their play, on the burros. He could form no picture of a life indoors behind adobe or brick walls. He did not believe that Manuel could be happy when shut within the walls of a casa.

So he said in answer to Donna Hulita, "We have made a plan by which we may both be together and stay out of doors. That is good for Manuel, because he must always be out of doors where he can see the mountains."

He told the plan and she listened with much sympathy, and then said gently, "But it would take you a long time to earn money in that way.

Señora Gomez will have pretty clothes all ready for Manuel when he goes into her service. She is going to dress him just as Don Felipe is dressed, with silver buttons on his embroidered leather clothes, and a beautiful red and blue sash. He will look like a little hacendado."

Benito had nothing more to say. He fixed his eyes upon Manuel's face, while Manuel fixed his upon Donna Hulita.

"I do not know," said Manuel at last. "I cannot tell now. Perhaps I can tell to-morrow."

It was almost the first time in his life that the boy had used the common Mexican expression, "hasta mañana" (until to-morrow), but there was good reason for his using it now.

Until to-morrow they could talk together, they three, about the old life and what the new one would be like, were Manuel to go across the mountains at last.

As for Donna Hulita, back in the great casa, she smiled to think that she had not gained her way. "Until to-morrow!" she repeated. "How these peons do put everything off until to-morrow." Then she remembered that Manuel was not really a peon. His father was a Spaniard, and his name, the name that old Juana gave to him, was that of Don Felipe's own family.

"It will be better for him to take another name,"

she said to herself. "If he goes to Señora Gomez, he shall go as Manuel Juarez." Then she added, after a moment's thought, "If the look in his face means anything, he will go."

She was not wrong in her thought. Manuel, on the next day, stood once again before her and said he would go to Mexico City and become a page to Señora Gomez. "But," he added, "Benito must go also."

Donna Hulita smiled. "I thought Benito could not be moved from the bedstead," she said.

"We will wait one week before we go," said Manuel, "then Benito will be the same as always. The doctor said so."

"Ah well," said the lady, "it will make no difference to Señora Gomez. It shall be as you say."

When Benito heard of the decision he looked beyond the open doorway to the mountain-top. Something of Manuel's look was in his face as he said, "It is a good thing that I should be with you, Manuel, else when you get to the mountain-top you may think the stars are only flowers under your feet."

The tears sprang to Manuel's eyes. "My Benito," he said, "this hacienda, where we have played together, and where the flowers grow, will always be the dearest place in the world to us both."

CHAPTER XI

CASTLES IN THE AIR

The week dwindled away until only a couple of days were left before the two boys were to start on their journey. There had been many talks between Manuel, Benito, and the band.

José had once been on the train as far as Puebla, and could tell the boys of the sights to be seen from the car windows. They were all much interested in the stories he could tell of his travels.

"Did all the peon boys who lived near the stations go to meet the trains as we do?" asked one of the band.

"Yes," said José, "but nowhere were there such good looking Indians as ours, and they stood very still as if they did not know how to play as many good games as we do."

"No one could have such good times as we do at Don Felipe's hacienda," said Juan. As he spoke it was plainly to be seen that his old sullen scowl was gone, and he looked bright and happy. The boys no longer called him "Black Juan."

"But if Manuel and Benito go away," said

Pedro, "we shall have no more good times." He looked ready to cry at the thought.

"Perhaps we are ready for something else," said Juan, who it seemed had always thought a little for himself. "It is not well to be playing burro-corrido when one is no longer a child."

"Yes," said Pedro, "we also may work as the burros do, and earn pesos for Don Felipe."

"But why not, if it is the custom?" asked the band, anxious to hear José tell more of his journey.

"One could see villages and haciendas from the car windows," said José, "and sometimes a river with women washing clothes in the water. At an hacienda station I saw a man carrying lunch-baskets on a long pole over his shoulder, just as Pedro often carries the lunches to our own laborers in the fields. At another place many Indians were gathered for a picnic, and for a moment I heard the sound of the music to which they were dancing."

The band drew its breath at José's words. Often, in the evening, when the day's work was over, some one in their own hacienda played on the guitar or tambourine, and they loved the sound. At times one of their number would appear with a borrowed guitar which each would handle lovingly, picking some little melody from the strings.

Sitting beside Benito's bedstead, as they had done so much in these last days, speaking of things

Washing Clothes in the River. *Page* 56.

Carrying Luncheon-Baskets. *Page* 56.

which stirred them strangely, a change had come over the boys of which they themselves were hardly conscious.

Juan had expressed it, but did not realize all that it meant, when he had said, "Perhaps we are ready for something else." And now Manuel surprised them all by suddenly saying "It is a bad custom."

The boys looked at him in amazement, as he continued in an excited voice, "We need not always do as the peons do, work for Don Felipe a whole lifetime."

"That is true," said Pedro approvingly, "we will play a little now and then."

Manuel looked at him in despair, but Juan understood what was in Manuel's mind, even while Benito was speaking from the bed.

"It is that we must earn centavos and save them, and in the end we can have a burro and a house of our own," he said.

"Ah," said Juan, "if Manuel and Benito are going to leave the hacienda and dress like hacendados, who knows but they may become real ones?"

The band opened their eyes and were speechless. The two ideas were hard to manage at first.

It would be very pleasant to own a house, a little thatched hut, and a burro. That thought lodged in their minds and never left them.

At the same time they believed that the two boys who were going to Mexico City were to become hacendados. The two thoughts never disputed with one another.

"Sometime, when I have driven my burro to the market with a load of pottery," said Juan, "Manuel and Benito will ride along on their fine horses and buy it all from me."

Not one of the boys had ever earned a single centavo, but that made no difference. Before the two days were passed they had built many thatched huts with the pesos they were going to earn, and each saw himself the owner of a long procession of burros.

But Manuel built no such castles in the air. He hunted up little Pepita and said good-bye to her.

"I am not making the hard signs in the school now," she told him. "Nothing ever came of them. But one can wear pretty clothes after one has learned to make them."

As she spoke, she held up a little frame in which she was making drawn-work on a piece of coarse linen.

Manuel pleased the little girl by taking much interest in the pattern she was making with the threads.

"The cook in the big casa is showing me how to do it," said Pepita. "This picture in the border is

Pepita in the Doorway. *Page* 58.

a butterfly, and the one in the middle is going to be the Mexican eagle."

"It looks very pretty," said Manuel, "but I could make the signs in the school more easily, myself."

Pepita stood in the doorway on the morning when Manuel and Benito rode out, with one of the overseers, to go to the station at Santa Ana. Manuel's band was there, too, and one of the boys picked a little tune on the guitar, while the rest stood in a group about him.

Grandmother Juana had left the corn she was grinding, and stood also in the group, tears rolling down her wrinkled cheeks.

The boys saw them all plainly, but little Pepita, waving her frame of drawn-work, stood out clearer than the rest.

For a long time after the carriage had passed out of sight, the boys of the band stood at the gateway.

Then José said with a sigh, "I wonder how it would seem to ride in a carriage behind real horses."

But Juan looked toward the mountain-top and said, "Over there is the land where silver and gold lie in the streets. Manuel and Benito can lean from their carriage door and pick it up."

Old Juana asked him to repeat his words, and when at last he made her understand, she seemed very angry. "There is nothing of the sort," she

said. "There is misery and dirt in that city where they are going. I would not live there myself for all the silver and gold in the whole world."

But the boys did not believe her.

"Where Manuel and Benito are there is always happiness," they said loyally to each other.

And from that moment it became their golden dream to go some day, all together, across the mountain, to find Manuel and Benito in that wonderful City of Mexico.

CHAPTER XII

A RIDE ON THE TRAIN

Not one of the soldiers of Montezuma ever felt more excitement in going forth to battle than did Manuel and Benito when they seated themselves in the train to begin their journey.

"It is a pity that the boys could not come on the burros to the station to see us off," said Benito. Just then the guard called "Vamonos!" The train started, and the two held their breath for joy.

Benito forgot the band and clutched Manuel's arm. "This is better than galloping on the old burros," he shouted, thinking that Manuel had suddenly gone deaf. Manuel was looking with a fascinated gaze to see objects flying past the car windows.

At the next station they remembered the band, because a group of Indians stood on the platform with canes to sell. The canes had beautiful carved heads which took the fancy of the tourists in the first-class cars.

Manuel and Benito were travelling in the second-

class car. As Manuel saw how many of the canes were sold, he said, "It is a pity the boys could not see them. They could soon learn to carve heads on canes, and they could earn many centavos in the same way."

"But the boys have no knives," said Benito. "They must first earn the centavos to buy the knives before they can make the canes."

However they soon forgot the boys again, for there was some wonderful new sight to see every moment.

"There is a maguey field like our own," cried Benito.

"Oh, a bridge, a bridge!" shouted Manuel.

The bridge over which the train was passing was so high in the air that the boys could hardly see the river below.

"José did not begin to tell us all the wonderful things," said Benito.

Suddenly Manuel called, "See the beautiful casas!"

"They are not all casas," explained the overseer. "Many of them are churches."

Manuel saw in the distance the colored domes of the churches of the City of the Angels. They glistened in the sunshine in colors of white, red, brown, yellow, blue and gray, and the sight filled the boys with joy.

"I think the angels may live there now," said little Benito.

But the overseer was telling them about the battle-field to the north of the city of Puebla. "Eleven times have armies gathered before the gates of this city," he said.

Manuel thought to himself that it was a great pity that he could not have seen something of the glory of it all, but the overseer went on, "No place in all Mexico is more famous. Here fought our great generals, Iturbide, Zaragoza, and Diaz."

"Hear him," whispered Benito. "What a mouthful of words he takes. I wish Pedro could try them. It would set him to choking."

But Manuel was asking about the great hill to the left of the city.

"That is the pyramid that was built hundreds of years before Cortez saw America," answered the overseer. "From the cathedral on top of the pyramid one can see a mighty distance. On the plain there are many villages, each one with a church tower rising above the low roofs. Fifty-seven churches can be seen from the cathedral."

Even Benito was quiet for a moment to think what a sight it must be.

They left Puebla behind them, and Benito began to feel strange. "I do not know what is the matter here," he said, putting his hand over his heart.

The overseer heard him and said, "I think it is the beginning of homesickness."

He was sure of it presently when the child put his hand to his eyes and brushed away a tear.

It was the sight of many burros toiling patiently over the plain and carrying heavy burdens for their Indian masters who trudged along beside them, that reminded him of home.

But he tried to make the overseer think the tear was for pity of the poor beasts. "They never have any time to play," he said.

The man understood and smiled. "When we heard that the steam-engine was coming to Mexico," he said, "we thought it would make the burros' load much lighter, but there seems to be no difference."

Then he thought of something to divert Benito's mind. "The first engine and cars that were carried to Mexico City," he said, "had to be dragged in pieces over the mountains by mules."

Benito began to listen. "How many pieces were there?" he asked.

"Oh, a great many," answered the overseer carelessly. "The pieces were loaded into wagons, and the roads over the mountain-passes were so hard to climb that sometimes sixty-six mules had to pull together."

The boys nodded their heads. "That must have been a fine sight," they said.

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"Many Burros Toiling Patiently over the Plain." *Page* 64.
(Popocatepetl in the Distance.)

"Yes," replied the overseer. "Don Felipe's father drove his finest horses to Mexico City to try their speed against that of the steam-engine."

"Ah, and which won?" asked Manuel.

"The steam-engine always won, although the engineer sometimes let Don Luis think he was going to win."

Benito felt no more homesickness. The train was climbing over the mountains and through great passes. Manuel felt as if he were at last among the stars, and looked in wonder at the valleys they were leaving behind them.

CHAPTER XIII

THE END OF THE JOURNEY

It was Benito who looked forward and saw the beautiful lake. "This is the lake where Cortez launched his boats," said the overseer.

"The boats which the Tlaxcalan Indians in our own state helped him to make?" asked Manuel.

"Yes."

"And I suppose they took the boats also to pieces and brought them up here," said Benito, who did not suppose it at all.

"Yes, that is just what they did," was the answer. "The boats were small, flat-bottomed ones, which could be easily taken apart and put together again, and eight thousand Tlaxcalan Indians carried them over the mountains on their backs."

"I almost wish I had lived then," said Benito; but he thought of the sights before them, and the many new things to find out about, and shook his head. "It is best as it is," he said, "there are still good times to be had for the making."

"How do you suppose Cortez felt when he first saw the City of Mexico?" asked Manuel.

"I never heard what he said," replied the overseer, "but it must have been something like,

'What a fine lot of villages to destroy!' because he went to work at once to destroy them."

"How long do you think it took him?" asked Benito.

"History says that seventy-five days from the time he went to conquer the Aztecs the valley of Mexico all lay in one smouldering ruin."

"Pedro was right," said the boy indignantly, "he was a bad man."

"Well, he found men here before him who were just as bad. One of these men, when he was only a boy, tossed his nurse into the well because she displeased him. His name was Ixtlilxochitl."

"I think his name was to blame for it," said Manuel with a laugh. "That name is enough to make its owner do something pretty bad."

The overseer laughed also. "If that is so, those old names seem to have worked lots of mischief," he said.

"Tell us some more," said Benito. "It makes me shiver to hear it, but I like it."

"Ah, Benito," said Manuel, "you would never make a brave soldier if you must shiver when you hear such tales."

Benito gave Manuel a playful blow with his fist. "Just see what I would do if I had to fight for you," he said.

"You will never have to fight for me," answered

Manuel, quickly. "I can fight for myself."

But the overseer was speaking again. "Did you ever hear of Montezuma?" he asked.

"Yes," said Manuel, "he was that good priest who was sweeping out the temple more than four hundred years ago when they went to tell him that he was to be the ruler of Mexico."

"That is right. The empire became a very splendid one under his rule. He was a kingly looking man, and when he went to war, dressed in his war-feathers and armor, it must have been a fine sight."

"I didn't know that they had needles and thread to make clothes, and the right material for armor, four hundred years ago," said Benito, opening his eyes wide in surprise.

"Oh, yes, they always had the maguey plant in Mexico. The Aztecs got good thread from the fiber, and the thorns at the tip of the leaves make as good pins and needles as you can find anywhere."

"What did Señor Montezuma do when he was not making pins and needles or going to war?" asked Benito mischievously.

"He was building fine temples and statues to put into them. But he sometimes looked to see if the gold-fish in his tanks were in good condition, for he had a beautiful garden where they were kept."

"I did not know that those old warriors ever stopped to play," said Manuel.

"Oh, they had royal games! They held a jubilee at the end of every cycle, which was better than any bull-fight in Mexico to-day," said the overseer.

"What is a cycle?" asked the boy.

"It is a certain number of years. With the Aztecs it was fifty-two years. At the end of every cycle of fifty-two years they let the fires in all of the temples go out. Then the priests journeyed to a certain mountain where they held a festival, and with flint and tinder they lighted a new fire which was to burn through another cycle."

"If it happened only once in fifty-two years," said Benito, "Montezuma could not have been to many such festivals."

"No, he was still young when he was killed by an arrow from the bow of his own nephew, but he reigned in great splendor while he was emperor."

"How do you know that, if it happened so many years ago?" asked the boy.

"Because of the ruins that are still to be seen, and the stone images that are still dug from the ground where they have lain for four hundred years and more. And there are banners and ornaments in our museums that belonged to the ancient people."

"It is very wonderful," said Manuel. "I should like to see some of the things."

But Benito was tired of hearing so much that was old. "I would rather hear about Don Luis's house where we are going to live in the oldest city in America," he said. "I hope that is not old also."

"No," said the overseer, "it is one of the finest casas in the city. There are three patios inside the walls, and there is much gold and silver about the walls and stairways. You will have much to learn about the customs of the family."

Benito looked sober. "I care not how much gold and silver is in the casa, if there are only plenty of bright flowers growing in the patios," he said.

"There are plenty of both," was the answer.

"What are we going to do for Señora Gomez, after she has dressed us in fine clothes?" asked Manuel.

"You will run every time she claps her hands for you," said the overseer. He was a man who had been in the service of the family all his life, and could tell the boys much about Señora Gomez and Don Luis.

"I can run," said Benito. "Manuel was the only one of the band who could beat me. Señora Gomez will think she has two cargadors."

The Mexican cargador is a man of burden, just as the Mexican burro is a beast of burden. He will take a heavy load on his back and run with it for miles. For many centuries he was the only expressman in the country. It was in Benito's mind that Señora Gomez wanted him and Manuel in her casa to be cargadors for her.

"But I do not see how she can keep us busy all the time," he said to Manuel. "Sometimes we will slip out of the casa and find our way to the plaza. There must be music in the plaza just as there is at the city of Tlaxcala."

The overseer smiled to hear the two boys talk. He saw that in their minds the City of Mexico was very much like the little city of their native state, which had seen its best days in the time of the great Cortez.

He would have told them something about the beautiful Alameda where the pride of Mexico can be seen every Sunday; something about the wide streets, the shops, the electric lights, the fountains and monuments, but there was no time. The train was already rolling into the station and they were at last in the country beyond the mountains, in the city of their dreams.

CHAPTER XIV

MORNING IN MEXICO CITY

"Manuel! Manuelito!"

Benito was standing at the head of the staircase which in Mexican houses leads from the upper balcony to the patio below. This patio is surrounded by the servants' rooms, offices and stables.

Benito sent his call in a hoarse whisper straight down the marble staircase and across the patio. At the stable door stood Manuel, stroking the nose of a beautiful horse. He turned and looked up at Benito.

It was a wonder that Manuel knew the boy in such splendid clothes, or that Benito knew Manuel, for that matter.

An embroidered leather suit of vest, jacket and trousers, had changed the ragged little boy into a distinguished looking señor.

Benito's hair was curly and his eyes were always sparkling with laughter, else one must have stood quite in awe of such a fine looking person.

Manuel was dressed exactly as Benito was. The only difference between them was in their hair and

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Patio in the House of Señora Gomez. *Page* 72.

eyes. Manuel's hair was straight, and his eyes looked at one in a proud serious way.

When Señora Gomez looked into Manuel's eyes, she behaved just as Donna Hulita had done. She said nothing for several moments. Then she nodded her head, but her words had nothing to do with the nodding.

"What did you think of the horses?" she asked.

It had pleased Señora Gomez to send a carriage to the station to meet the two little boys.

"You must not begin by spoiling them," Don Luis advised her; but she answered, "I have lived sixty years, and have never seen anyone spoiled by a little kindness."

Then she added, "It would be sad to have their bodies here, and their hearts back in the hacienda."

"Well, well!" answered the Don, "have your own way. It will be nothing new."

So the boys rode behind a pair of the very finest Mexican horses on their way from the station to the casa.

Perhaps Señora Gomez wished to learn whether the boys would notice the city sights and pay no attention to the horses; or whether they were like so many other Indian boys, and would not notice anything at all.

She soon found that Manuel and Benito were two unusual boys. They had not only watched the

horses, but they had asked the overseer so many questions about the city sights that he was quite tired with answering them.

It was Benito who answered Señora Gomez' question. "If the horses that raced against the steam-engine were like those, it must have been a fine engine," he said.

Señora Gomez laughed and looked at Benito for the first time. "Which is Manuel?" she asked.

"I am Manuel." The boy said it with the quiet dignity that was a part of him.

"I was sure of it," said the Señora, nodding her head again. Then she put her hand upon the boy's head in a kindly way. "Donna Hulita wrote me that you would not come without Benito," she said, and added, "I am very glad of it."

She turned the boys over to the care of the housekeeper, who put them to bed as soon as she could.

"They are good enough muchachos," she said to her friend Terésa, the chamber-maid. "The curly-headed one talks most, but I can see that he listens when the other has anything to say."

In the early morning the boys were up and would have gone into the patio at once to look at the gardens, but Terésa stopped them. "You are to be dressed in your new clothes," she told them, and called the housekeeper.

It was many days before the housekeeper ceased talking about that dressing-party.

"Here stood Benito," she said, "saying, 'But first I must try on Manuel's trousers to see how much too large they are for me.' He got into one leg just in time to hear the charcoal-man in the street crying, 'Charcoal, sir! Charcoal, sir!' at which the boy ran to the window as fast as one bare leg and one covered one could carry him.

"Manuel ran after him, waving his jacket in the air, and together they watched the charcoal-man until he turned the corner. After that they came back to the dressing.

"But Benito had forgotten that the trousers were going on, and took them off to look at the beautiful stitches up and down the legs. Then he must needs look to see if the same stitches were on his own pair.

"He was greatly pleased to find both pairs alike, and started to get into his own.

"But the tallow-woman must happen along at that very moment, calling, as always, 'Is there tallow?' Here was something new, and the boys must again run to look. 'Hey sebooooooo!' called Benito after her, and you could not tell which was the tallow-woman and which Benito. But I trembled for fear of what he might call next.

"Even so, the trousers were at last safely on

four legs, and it was time for the vest. But it seems that the time was also arrived for the corn-cake seller. 'Corn-cakes, hot from the oven, my love!' he cried, and naughty Benito hearing him, answered, "Here I am coming, my love!' and was off again for the window, with Manuel of course behind him.

"I, myself, was quite dead," said the woman plaintively, "yet what could a body do but laugh.

"And when they had at last finished looking over the jackets and each trying on the other's, there was old Indian Pedro in the street calling, 'Hot boiled corn!' to divert them once more. Ah, it was a long dressing!"

Long as it was, the boys ate their own breakfast and explored the patios, but still Señora Gomez had not left her chamber.

Then it was that Manuel went to look at the horses, while Benito climbed the marble staircase to look at the flowers in the gallery above the court-yard.

He found his way into the rooms opening into the gallery, and was lost in wonder at the sight of so many things he had never imagined.

"Manuel must see them, too," he said to himself, so he stole softly to the head of the staircase, and whispered, so as not to wake Señora Gomez, if she were sleeping near by.

"Manuel, Manuelito!" he whispered, and Manuel ran up the staircase to join him.

"They have many more things here than they know what to do with," whispered Benito, as the two boys looked from costly rugs lying on the floor to more costly ones hanging on the walls. "You must tell Grandmother Juana to hang your sleeping mat beside the beautiful tomato labels on her wall," he added; "then she will have a casa like this one of Señora Gomez."

Manuel smiled as his thoughts went to the tiny room where old Juana lived. He looked about this one, so very different; with priceless ornaments on rare tables, with wonderful pictures hanging between the rugs on the walls, and said gently, "Grandmother Juana would not be ashamed to ask Señora Gomez to sit in her chair."

But Benito did not hear. He was looking at the picture of a long line of burros, with packs on their backs, climbing a steep path.

Benito stood very still and forgot everything but the patient little animals which were so familiar to him. Suddenly he spoke aloud, half angrily, "Why must they always be so sad? Even here where they have only beautiful things about them, they are still sad and patient."

"They are like our poor peons back on the hacienda," said Manuel.

The boys stood hand in hand, looking up at the picture, and making, in their pretty costumes, a part of the larger picture about them.

Señora Gomez, standing in the doorway, looked at them in delight. She clapped her hands softly together, and the boys turned at the sound.

"We have much to do to-day," the Señora said cheerfully, "I shall hold my Christmas posada to-morrow, and we must go to the market for the things with which to build our Nacimiento."

The two boys caught their breath and clutched hands more tightly. They had been afraid that, in coming away from the hacienda at this Christmas time, they would miss the joy of seeing a Nacimiento and sharing a posada.

Christmas is the happiest time in the whole year for a Mexican child.

No family is too poor to hold some kind of festivity, which is usually called a posada. At this festivity there is much merriment, with feasting, and dancing, and exchanging of gifts.

The two boys, who had come to act as pages for a rich lady in her grand casa, forgot their duties and suddenly rolled together upon the floor in their great joy.

CHAPTER XV

CHRISTMAS SHOPPING

"I have never heard that it is the custom for pages to roll upon the floor," said Señora Gomez with a twinkle in her eye.

Benito was on his feet in an instant. "Shame, Manuel," he whispered, "the naguales will be after you."

But Manuel was already upon his feet and both boys were making their finest salute to the Señora.

"Your pardon," they murmured, as old Juana had told them to do should things go wrong.

However, Señora Gomez smiled kindly and bade them go find their sombreros, after which they were to escort her to her carriage.

That taking of the lady to her carriage was a sight worth seeing.

Don Luis stood on the gallery above and watched the group as it passed down the marble staircase. Manuel went first, leading Señora Gomez by the hand as if she were a queen and he were her courtier. Benito walked behind, carrying the lady's

purse. At the carriage door Manuel handed her up the step, then stood aside with folded arms as she told him to do, while Benito closed the door.

Don Luis saluted from the gallery. "They will do very well," he called.

The boys sprang to their seat at the back of the carriage, the coachman drove through the great double doors to the street, and the drive began.

Many people turned to smile at the two tiny pages sitting so solemnly in their seat, as they had been told to do. Their arms were folded across their chests, their eyes fixed straight in front of them.

"The cunning things!" exclaimed an American on the sidewalk to her friend. And the friend replied, "They won't be able to keep their eyes off the stalls in the plazas long."

She was right. At the first street corner an Indian passed them, carrying over his shoulder a long pole from which hung paper dolls as large as the boys, which jumped and twisted with the motions of the pole.

Manuel saw the sight out of a corner of his eye, but he took no notice of it. Benito saw it also, and his head was quickly turned to see it more plainly. He turned back again immediately, and looked straight ahead as before, but he was quivering with excitement.

"Oh, Manuel," he whispered softly, "they are piñatas! There is a clown, a dancing girl, a ship with all sails set, and a queer old cat."

It is only in Mexico that one can see a piñata. It takes the place of a Christmas tree in the lives of little Mexican children. Some of the piñatas cost only a few pennies, some of them cost many dollars.

Benito had never seen such fine ones as those that hung from the Indian's long pole. They were made, as are all the piñatas, in the shape of a person, an animal, or some object which will hold a bowl of sweets, rattles, whistles and crackers, or anything which is usually hung upon a Christmas tree.

The piñata is covered with bright colored streamers of tissue paper and tinsel decorations. At the Christmas fiesta it is broken open, and the rattles and sweets fall in a shower and make much fun.

Hardly had one Indian passed the boys than there were others. Dozens of men and women were selling the piñatas on the streets that day, as they always do just before Christmas.

Benito sighed. "Ah, Manuel," he said under his breath, "I don't believe I can bear it."

"What is it you would do, Benito?" asked Manuel softly.

"I would jump down from this horrible shelf

and run here and there where my feet would take me."

Manuel nodded, "I, too, suffer, poor Benito," he answered, "but have patience, it cannot last much longer."

Manuel was right. They soon stopped in the great plaza. The boys sprang down from their hateful shelf, Señora Gomez was landed safely on the ground, and the boys forgot their sufferings in looking at the Christmas gifts.

In and out among the stalls slipped Benito, forgetting and then remembering Manuel, as he spied the many things they both loved. He crooned a little song to himself all the while; it rose with his pleasure, or died away at the sight of something grotesque.

He stood long before the stand where wax bells and flowers were sold. There were many handfuls of the little white bells, which shook with every breath, and over which Benito's song rose so loudly that the Indian woman behind the stand smiled at him and offered him one of them.

He took it with his prettiest thanks, and turned to the stall next to hers, where there were many scenes in wax. A newsboy in wax, so tiny that it stopped Benito's song, caught his eye. "I could make something as good as that," he said aloud.

The Indian who sat beside the stall looked at

him sharply. "Here is a piece of wax," he told the boy, "show me what you can do."

Benito took the wax and began to shape it into a head. He fixed his eyes upon the face of the Indian woman who had given him the bell. After his fingers had worked the wax into the shape of a head, the features began to appear. Finally he placed a woman's head before the man. There was a smile on the mouth, the same sweet smile with which the Indian woman gave the bell to him.

"It is Terésa!" exclaimed the man in surprise, but Benito was presenting it to the woman herself. "May you always have joy," he said simply.

Señora Gomez arrived just at that moment. "We have been looking for you everywhere," she said. But the Indian man called to the woman with the bells. "Show the Señora," he commanded.

She held the head, with its beautiful smile, toward Señora Gomez. The Señora studied it carefully. Then she said, "You are a genius, my little Benito."

The boy looked up into her face. "I do not know what that is," he said.

The lady did not explain. She led the boys to a stand where there were all sorts of things, from Chinese lanterns to woolly monkeys. There were

peanuts, wooden toys, hideous masks, jumping-jacks and wooden whistles. There was also a nagual.

A nagual is a queer, horrible thing that is sometimes used to frighten children and make them good. This toy nagual had a woolly body on four little legs that were much too small for him. The face was a man's face, but so ugly that Benito shut his eyes and turned his head away.

Some Mexicans think there are real naguales the size of men, and that they have magic power and can become invisible. Benito did not really believe in them, because Manuel did not; but at the sight of this one he pulled Manuel away to the candy stands.

Señora Gomez followed. It pleased her to let the boys do as they liked for a little while.

Among the candies were some figures of the men who fight with the bulls at a bull-fight. None of them were more than an inch or two tall, but they were perfect in shape. The boys named them all, even to the grand person who rides up to the president of the arena and asks if the fight may begin.

Benito looked at the tiny candy horse with its red saddle cloth embroidered in gold, the tiny scarlet reins, the rider with his plumed hat, and laughed. "I wonder that you do not wish to

become an alguacil like him," he said, "that you may wear his fine clothes."

Señora Gomez saw Manuel put his arm affectionately over Benito's shoulder and heard him say, "I would much rather be the matador there. He has even finer clothes. But it is not for the sake of the fine clothes, it is for the sake of killing the bull at once, with one stroke of the knife; then there is no more suffering."

The Señora nodded her head again. "That was spoken as Gabriel would have spoken it," she said to herself. Gabriel was her son. He had gone from her many years before and she had never seen him since. But there were often times when she longed for him, because he had been dearer to her than anyone else in the world.

He had gone away because he wished to be a matador. The life of the bull ring, with its excitement and danger and its chance for bravery before thousands of admiring people, had called him so strongly that he obeyed the call.

Señora Gomez and Don Luis begged him to enter the military school instead; they promised him plenty of danger in the army. Finally they forbade him ever to mention the bull ring to them again. So he went away and they knew nothing more about him.

Soon after he went, they heard of a remarkably

brave matador who had suddenly appeared in a city to the south. For a little while his fame grew, then it was reported that he had gone over the ocean to Spain and would never return to Mexico. That was ten years before, and Señora Gomez had never been her old self since.

It was not strange that a high-spirited boy should wish to become a matador. He is always the hero of a bull-fight. He is the man who kills the bull after all the other actors have finished playing with him.

The matador is dressed in the most beautiful clothes. This candy one at which the boys were looking wore a pink jacket with white knee-breeches. A very much embroidered shirt was under the jacket, and there was a gorgeous scarlet sash around his waist. He wore white stockings and black slippers.

As Señora Gomez looked at Manuel she could not help thinking that he would look very handsome in the suit of a matador. Suddenly she said to herself, "He shall be dressed in such a suit at my posada to-morrow."

She hurried the boys a little after that, because there were many gifts to choose and the new suit to be bought.

Oh, the gifts! Benito was in quite a stupor before they were half selected. There were so many

toys, so many piñatas, so many boxes of delicious candy! There was so much hurrying back and forth between hundreds of stands which gleamed and sparkled like fairyland!

It was Manuel who kept his head; Manuel who closed Benito's fingers over baskets filled with packages, saying, "Hold them fast, you crazy Benito, else they will drop from your hand and you will never know it."

At last they had everything bought, including the matador's suit for Manuel and an alguacil's suit for Benito.

Then they were driven home to prepare the Nacimiento.

The Nacimiento is the Christmas altar and manger which may be seen in every house in Mexico, from the very poorest to the very richest.

Under Señora Gomez' directions great packing-boxes were placed one above another, like stairs, nearly to the ceiling in one of the finest rooms in the casa. Blue and white draperies were then thrown over the boxes, completely covering them. Mingled with the draperies were quantities of feathery gray moss.

On one of the stairs, wider than the others, a mirror was placed to represent a lake. China ducks and geese, and little boats, were scattered upon the water.

On the stair above the lake stood the manger-cradle in a little house. An exquisitely carved image lay in the cradle, and scattered about the house, inside and out, were groups of figures to represent Joseph and Mary and the others.

There were the three Kings who travelled from afar to see the new baby; there were sheep and a shepherd; there were men driving burros, and men on horseback. On the road leading up from the lake was a yoke of oxen dragging the heavy ox-cart of Mexico.

Above everything else, on the top stair, the altar was placed, surrounded with candles and flowers and tinsel. The candles were of every color in the rainbow and there were dozens of them. Over everything hung wreaths of the little white wax bells which shook constantly.

It was truly charming, and poor Benito stood before it when it was finished, clasping and unclasping his hands and saying, "If only Pedro, and José, and the others could see it!"

CHAPTER XVI

GABRIEL'S HOME-COMING

Benito walked in a dream for the next two days. He knew that wonderful things happened and that he was a part of them all, but not until many days had passed did they get straightened out in his mind.

He knew well that on Christmas Eve he opened the posada. In his alguacil's dress he rode a prancing pony across the patio and halted below the gallery. Don Luis, Señora Gomez, and all their relatives looked down upon him, and he asked permission for the festivities to begin. It was the way it happens in the arena, at a bull-fight. And just as the president of the arena throws down the keys to the alguacil, so Señora Gomez threw down the keys to Benito. He caught them in his hat and carried them to the porter who opened the great doors wide and the guests began to arrive.

From that moment both the boys were busy waiting upon lovely ladies and courtly men. Every one was dressed in his very best to do honor to the hostess, for this was the first time since Gabriel

went away that a ball had been given in the home of Señor Gomez.

After the dancing, Señora Gomez walked among her guests, with Manuel on her right and Benito on her left, each carrying a tray of gifts. To each guest she gave a gift and a pretty wish for happiness.

When there was nothing left to be given away, and the last good wish had been spoken, Manuel looked up into her face. "May the best gift and the greatest happiness of all come to you, Señora," he said.

She looked at him with tears in her eyes. "Ah, little one," she answered, "there is but one gift that can bring happiness to me." Then she turned to go away, but Manuel said gently, "What may that be, Señora?"

"To see my boy, Gabriel," she answered, and went to find Don Luis.

The two boys looked at one another. They had never heard of Gabriel, but Benito said that was no reason why they should not. "Let us ask the housekeeper if she knows him," he said.

To the housekeeper they went, and found her busy sending maids here and there with delicious things to eat and drink.

To her, in the midst of all her cares, Benito said, "And pray, who is Gabriel?"

The housekeeper was so astonished at the question that she looked at the boys with open eyes and mouth. Then, "Come with your questions when it is summer and no guests here to be kept from starving," she answered briefly, and went on with her work.

But the maid, who was just about to carry a tray to the dining-room, suddenly spoke with a frightened face. "I saw a strange man in the shrubbery of the patio an hour ago. He had the figure of Señor Gabriel," she said.

"What was he doing?" asked the housekeeper sharply.

"He was watching the people in the gallery," answered the maid.

"We must speak of it to Don Luis at once," said the housekeeper.

The boys went away, stealing a moment from Señora Gomez to look through the patio shrubbery for a strange man.

"As if every man here, who entered through the big door, was not a strange man to us," said Benito grumblingly, as they started.

They were fortunate, however, for at the foot of the great staircase, in the shadow of a column, hung the housekeeper's parrot. So many lights and people kept it from sleeping. As the boys stopped near its cage, uncertain which way to turn

first, the parrot suddenly croaked, "Adios! Adios! Look at the strange señor!"

Benito was the only one who was startled. A man's figure moved quickly from behind the next column, and Manuel saw him. Before he could speak the man was boldly crossing the patio under the glare of the lights. As the boys saw his face they looked at each other and Manuel said, "He looks like Don Luis;" while Benito said, "It must be Señor Gabriel himself," and both boys added, "The Señora's son!"

Just as they started to follow him, to tell him what Señora Gomez had said, there was a call from the staircase, "Manuel, where is Manuel?"

"It is to break the piñata," said the boy. "Señora Gomez told me to be ready after the passing of the gifts."

"Go then," said Benito, "and I will follow the stranger and tell him that the Señora has spoken of him."

It was well that Benito was not to break the piñata. Excited as he was, he could never hit it even with his eyes open, and Manuel was to be blindfolded.

Two piñatas were hanging among the trees,—a full-rigged ship, and a clown. The guests flocked down the staircase, and while Benito disappeared into the farther patio after the stranger, Señora

Gomez blindfolded Manuel; then she led him to the spot from which he was to strike at the clown.

It was a pretty sight. The boy stood in the midst of so much light and color, while the arcades of the casa, also a blaze of light, rose behind as a background.

There was much laughing from the guests as Manuel struck once at the clown and failed to hit him.

"That is being but a poor matador," said Señora Gomez. "Try again."

At the second stroke the clown broke and the air was filled with jumping frogs, whistles, wonderful puzzles, sweets, and many other things.

"Now Benito! Benito must break the ship," called the Señora.

"I will find him," said Manuel, and snatching the handkerchief from his eyes, he dashed into the next patio. He found Benito and the stranger under a distant tree. The man's hand was on the boy's shoulder holding him still, while he watched the group of beautiful women and handsome men with a sad look in his eyes.

"What did Señora Gomez say to you when you missed the piñata?" he asked Manuel before the boy could speak.

"She said I was but a poor matador," said the boy simply.

The man took the handkerchief which Manuel still held, and stepped forward toward the company. The laughter grew quiet. Everybody fastened eyes upon Señora Gomez who stood still and waited for the stranger to reach her. At her feet he knelt in a princely way and held out the handkerchief. "Will you let this matador try?" he asked.

Señora Gomez began to sob. "Oh, Gabriel," she said, taking both his hands, "Why did you go away?"

Then from a great stillness there rose a great noise. Everybody was suddenly talking to everybody else, and no one seemed to know what became of Don Luis, Señora Gomez and Gabriel, who had quietly disappeared.

The guests also began to disappear. The boys found themselves holding open carriage doors. Everybody was slipping away from the posada, that the happy family might be left alone in its joy to celebrate the Nacimiento.

As the last carriage rolled through the great entrance, Benito held up his finger to Manuel. "Hark!" he said. Manuel heard in the distance the stirring sound of music.

"Why do we stay when everybody else is going?" Benito asked, and without waiting for an answer, slipped out upon the sidewalk. Manuel

followed, not knowing just what he was going to do. The great doors closed behind them, for the porter had not seen them go out. Manuel might easily have knocked for the doors to be opened immediately, but he saw Benito, already yards away, hurrying toward the plaza from which came the sound of music.

Manuel looked forward toward Benito, then backward to the closed door. A smile flashed over his face. "If we are shut out into the city, we might just as well go and look at it," he said, very much as Benito might have spoken, and ran forward after his playmate.

No one missed them. The servants were so busy telling each other how it happened that they did not see Señor Gabriel in the patio shrubbery that a long time passed before any of them thought of the boys. Don Luis and Señora Gomez, of course, thought of no one but Gabriel.

They had been right in thinking he was the famous matador who left Mexico for Spain ten years before. It had taken him all those ten years to find out that he loved his home and his own country better than he loved the life of a matador.

"I will go into the army now, if you wish," he said to his father. "I have had enough of bull-fighting."

"No," Don Luis answered, "I need some one to

take the care off my shoulders. You have come home just at the right time."

Then Gabriel spoke of something else. There was a little child whom he wanted to see. After he left his home, he said, he went first up into the mountains; there, among the Indians, he found a beautiful girl, whom he married. A year later she died, but she left a baby son whose eyes were the eyes of a Gomez.

Gabriel had placed this child with an old Indian woman, meaning to have him brought up as a peon; but as the years passed he longed to see the boy. Through that longing to see his own son he grew to realize how deeply Señora Gomez must sorrow for her son, until at last he could stay away no longer.

He had entered the patio unnoticed in the dusk of the evening, behind two servants, and had watched for a fitting time to make himself known to his father and mother. That time came when Manuel went to find Benito to break the piñata.

"My own boy must be about the age of your Manuel," he told the Señora, and asked, "Where did you find him, Mother?"

"Hulita sent him to me from the hacienda," she answered.

"Why, Mother!" shouted Gabriel, "I left my baby with an Indian woman at Felipe's hacienda!"

Then there was great excitement again.

"We must question Manuel," said Señora Gomez, "and find out about his father and mother."

She clapped her hands together and a maid hurried into the room, only too glad to steal a look at Señor Gabriel.

"Go at once and find Manuel and bring him here," said Señora Gomez, and as the maid went out of the room Don Luis said, "Of course the boy has a father and mother at the hacienda. He will say he has whether he has or not, at this time of night."

They had been talking a long time and it was very late. Don Luis thought Manuel would be so tired and sleepy that he would know nothing at all.

But the maid returned, very much excited, and said, "We can not find Manuel anywhere, nor can we find Benito."

At this the casa was in an uproar. The boys were certainly nowhere inside the walls, and as no one had seen them go out the servants all declared that the naguales had spirited them away.

But Don Luis spoke sharply. "Out with the horses," he said. "We must search the city."

CHAPTER XVII

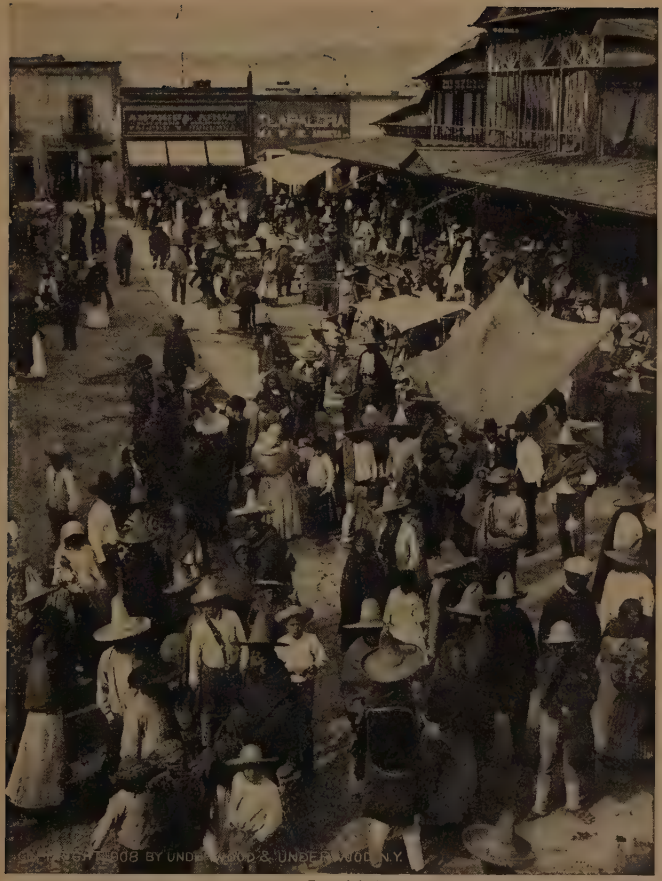
THE BOYS HAVE AN ADVENTURE

"It is of no use to stay always in the casa," said Benito, when Manuel overtook him. "If we do we shall know nothing of what is going on outside."

There were things outside which were better left unlearned, had Benito but known it. There were the people who have no homes and live wicked lives. They live in dark corners and steal whenever they can find a chance. They are the outcasts, and were known in olden days as leperos. There are hundreds of these people in Mexico City.

One of them had been hiding in the shadow of Don Luis's casa door until the guests began to go away. The Mexican doorways are so wide and deep that a person can easily hide in the shadow of one. It has always been the custom to keep the doors locked and the windows barred, lest the lepero, who so often leans against them, should try to get inside and steal.

It is such a common sight to see a person leaning against a window or post that a good Mexican mother warns her boy not to lean against a post for



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Market-Place in Mexico City. *Page* 99.

fear it will make him untruthful. "The post is untruthful," she tells him.

It was only after Porfirio Diaz became President of Mexico that robbers and bandits disappeared from the republic. He turned them all into the fine mounted police that ride over the country roads to-day. In their gray suits and red serapes they make a fine appearance, and they behave as well as they look.

There is no more robbing done along the country roads, but it is quite different in the city. The city policemen are always ready to do their best; they keep a good lookout through the day, and at night keep their lighted lanterns in the middle of the street. Then everybody knows just where they are. But in spite of this the thieves manage to keep pretty busy.

The poor creature who moved away from the door when Don Luis's guests began to leave saw the handsome costumes on the two boys, and saw also that they were but little fellows, so he followed them.

Benito and Manuel never once thought there was anything about them to tempt a thief. They stopped in the plaza long enough to see the fireworks going up all over the city. They listened to the band and watched groups of dancers. They looked at the beautiful gifts for sale everywhere.

They mingled with the crowds, but the thief hovered always somewhere near. It was not hard to keep the two picturesque boys in sight.

At last he found his chance. The Alameda, the great park of Mexico City, was ablaze with electric lights, and the boys wandered into one of the walks to look at the fountains. The thief followed, and was behind them when they sank at last, tired out, upon a seat beneath the trees.

"I wonder if there is any place in all the world so fine as this," said Benito happily. But at that moment the man's hand fell upon his shoulder, and the boy started to his feet.

The encounter did not last very long. Benito and Manuel were strong boys from a mountain valley who had learned to move quickly in their games and burro-riding.

The man had Benito, and almost had Manuel, in his grasp, but Manuel's head was always a cool one. He sprang to one side, saw in a flash what was happening, and jumped upon the thief. It was a good jump. He landed just where he meant to do, upon the thief's back, with his arms about the dirty neck, and held him in a hug that was meant to last. At the same time he opened his mouth and there went forth from it a roar that would have done credit to a yearling bull.

A policeman in the next path hunted for his lan-

tern and rushed to the spot, but some one was there before him.

A man, on his way to find a comfortable place for the night, reached the struggling group just as it was rolling on the ground with Benito underneath.

When the policeman held up his lantern he saw the thief lying still in a heap, and the two boys rubbing their heads.

"I could not choose which to hit first," said the man; then catching sight of Benito's face, he exclaimed, "Why, 'tis my friend of the wax head!"

"'Tis true that my head feels like a wax one," complained Benito.

Then into the group there burst others, and still others, as is the way the world over, when there is a disturbance. Among them was Señor Gabriel, who took charge of the boys and carried them home, after explaining to the policeman that they were not enemies of the republic.

"I do not believe," said Señora Gomez, her face pale with so much excitement, "that it will be best to ask about Manuel's father and mother to-night. Perhaps it would be better to wait until to-morrow to find out anything more we ought to know."

But the two boys were sound asleep, and doubtless had she asked him, Manuel would have said he had several fathers and mothers back on the hacienda, for he was too tired to think.

CHAPTER XVIII

MANUEL'S FATHER

"Would you care to go back to the hacienda again, and live with Grandmother Juana?"

Señor Gabriel asked the question after listening to Manuel's story of his hacienda life with the old Indian woman.

"Oh, no," answered the boy, "I would rather blacken the shoes of Señora Gomez all day."

"With a chance to run away at night?" asked Señor Gabriel slyly.

Manuel flushed. He realized how much trouble the adventure had caused them all, although he had been asleep most of the time since it had happened, fifteen hours before.

Gabriel smiled at the boy's red cheeks. "Ah, well," he said, "there is no need for you to do either. I am looking for a baby boy whom I left with old Juana ten years ago. He is my son, and I am his father."

Both the boys looked astonished and did not seem to understand. "This is the biggest surprise of all," said Benito. "Will you let him go to the military school?"

"What about the military school?" asked Señor Gabriel.

"That is where Manuel wants to go," said the boy. And then it all came out. They told him about Manuel's dreams, about Pedro and José and the rest of the band, and about their ambition to become something better than peons.

Señor Gabriel listened and turned his face away. There was silence in the room for a long time after the boys finished telling the pathetic story.

Señora Gomez walked into the room, looked at the three, and saw that the boys were waiting for the man to speak.

"Why, Gabriel," she said, "what is troubling you?"

"I have been a bad son and a worse father," answered Gabriel. "It seems that the mountains speak a language which Manuel's heart caught and answered. I could not have made a peon of him, although I meant to do so."

Then the story was told over again to Señora Gomez. She learned of Donna Hulita's book, and that Manuel went to school with the little girls in order that he might learn to read it, while Benito made figures in clay outside the door.

"While Manuel goes to the military school, you shall go to the art school and learn to be an artist," said the Señora to Benito.

"That will do very well," said Benito in a daze. But when he could get Manuel off by himself to question him, Benito confessed that his head still felt as if it were made of wax. "What is it all about?" he asked. "This stranger, Señor Gabriel, how can it be that you can take him for a father so suddenly?"

"You did not listen, Benito," said Manuel, "or you would have heard them telling how he has been away in the Spanish country all these years, and was the most famous matador there."

"And is he going to give it all up for the sake of being a father to you?" asked Benito in surprise.

"Yes," said Manuel.

"You are not worth it, old Manuelito," answered Benito shortly; but he put his arm over the boy's shoulder as he spoke.

CHAPTER XIX

SIGHT-SEEING WITH SEÑOR GABRIEL

"There comes the President! Look quick!"

"Do sit still, Benito. You will see much better if you sit still."

"No, Manuel, it is not so. I should see nothing at all if I should sit like a pyramid as you do. Look at those flags. I can count over one hundred of them. And did you see the flowers in the bayonets as we came in?"

"Yes, crazy one, I saw everything; even the flowers under the cannon balls."

"That is just like you, Manuel, you see things without even looking at them."

"One could not help looking at so many flowers and banners and electric lights, Benito."

"Keep still, Manuel. Why do you keep on talking when the President is coming?"

"Keep still yourself, Benito."

The boys' voices were suddenly drowned as the band struck into the "Porfirio Diaz March," and the President of Mexico entered through an aisle of soldiers and cadets and passed to the stage.

It was the night for the distribution of prizes at the military academy. It seemed as if everybody in Mexico City was in the great theatre to see the sight.

Streamers, military emblems and banners were everywhere. Flowers wreathed the cannon which lined the entrance. Even the bayonets had been turned into bouquet holders, and from chandelier to chandelier hung festoons of evergreen and Chapultepec moss. The pillars of the patio were draped with flags and wreaths of flowers.

The cadets, for whom all this display was made, seemed a company of gods to the two little boys. Manuel could not help thinking of the time when he, too, might perhaps receive a medal from the President.

At the thought, all the people became a blur to his eyes and his heart thumped against his ribs. He looked up speechless into the face of Señor Gabriel who sat beside him.

The man looked down, saw what was in the boy's face and heart, and took the little hand into his own. Manuel snuggled close to him, and from that moment either would have fought men or bulls for the other.

Benito, on the other side of Manuel, knew nothing of what was going on between the boy and his father. He was wriggling about, sticking his el-

bows into Manuel, and asking question after question without waiting for an answer.

"Is this not better than seeing the palace at Chapultepec, or riding on the canal, or going to the pyramids?" he said.

There had been a month of sight-seeing since Señor Gabriel's home-coming. To see the cadets receive medals from the hand of the President was the climax to many pleasures which the boys had had since the posada.

First they had asked to see the barracks of the cadets. That meant a drive along one of the most beautiful avenues in the world, from the center of Mexico City out to Chapultepec Hill. Chapultepec means "grasshopper." "The Hill of the Grasshopper," repeated Benito in delight.

The way lay under great trees, and past charming little parks where the boys saw some of the finest statues in America. The road wound up the hill through a forest of cypress trees from which hung gray moss in festoons of beauty.

The boys took the drive late one afternoon, at the time when everybody in Mexico City who owns a pair of handsome horses takes the same drive.

Benito, of course, was wild with excitement over the splendor of it all. As the carriages containing beautiful women and children rolled by, the horses tossing their heads, the silver trappings of the har-

ness clinking, Señor Gabriel found it necessary to hold the boy for fear he might fall out of the carriage in his enthusiasm.

But in the misty loveliness of the drive up the hill to the President's palace, Benito sat quite still, too enchanted to stir.

The barracks adjoin the palace at the top of the hill, as the cadets act as a body-guard to the President. It was here that Manuel's feeling found expression, not in what he said, but in the way he held his head very high and walked proudly.

It is true that he always held his head high enough, but in Chapultepec Castle, with its memories of emperors, and its presence of three hundred high-spirited cadets, something in Manuel's eye and bearing made his friend Benito say, "Don't be so proud, old Manuel, or you'll scare people."

Señor Gabriel smiled at both the boys. "We will try sight-seeing on La Viga canal next," he said, "There is nothing there to make one feel too proud."

La Viga canal runs from the city to a small lake. Along the banks are straggling Indian villages. The Indians from these villages carry their market produce into the city on the canal. Sometimes their flat-bottomed boats almost hide the water. At other times canoes and dug-outs carry pleasure parties from the city to Santa Anita. From this

village one may take a little trip to the wonderful floating gardens.

Once a year there is the Feast of Flowers, when the canal is a fairyland. Then the water is covered with large and small boats, all manned by Indians. Bands play along the shore, and in the boats Indian women and girls, with wreaths of poppies on their heads and garlands of flowers around their necks, sing weird Indian songs, picking the strings of a guitar for an accompaniment.

The boys saw only a quiet, pleasant sight when they took their trip. Señor Gabriel chose a flat-bottomed boat to please Benito. "The boats of Cortez had to be flat-bottomed to get anywhere near the City of Mexico on this canal." he said, "and we will imagine we are some of the stragglers of his army."

"How many boats did he have?" asked Manuel.

"Thirteen brigantines," answered Señor Gabriel, "and they were launched on Lake Texcoco to the roar of artillery and military music."

"Cortez could not have done much without the help of those Tlaxcalans," observed Benito.

"They were a great aid, first and last," answered Señor Gabriel, "first in building the boats and carrying them to the lake, and last in tearing down the temples and palaces of the Aztecs."

"You must have missed the sight of so many

ruins when you were in the Spanish Country," said Benito. "Wherever we go in Mexico we see a few ruins."

Señor Gabriel laughed again. "There are many interesting ruins in Spain, too," he said, "but not so many as in Mexico. "To-morrow we will go to see the Pyramid of the Sun and the Pyramid of the Moon. Then we shall have a great respect for a people who could build so well that even earthquakes have not destroyed their work."

It was a trip of about thirty miles from Mexico City to the pyramids, and Señor Gabriel found the boys very quiet through it all. They listened to the stories of history that he had to tell, history as old as that of Egypt, but they cared little for them.

They liked better the stir and life of the city behind them and were glad to return to it.

"If it is wonders that we are to see," said Benito, "we can see them back in the city."

On the way back he said wistfully, "There is but one wish that I have a feeling to make."

"What is that?" asked Señor Gabriel.

"It is a very big wish. I do not think it could be given," said Benito humbly.

"You may tell it and we will see," said the man encouragingly.

Benito looked up into his face. He saw much there that reminded him of many things. "Your

pardon," he said as Juana had bidden, "may I whisper to Manuel?" and when permission was given he whispered at great length in Manuel's ear.

"He says," said Manuel after the whispering was over, "that Juan and José and the others, especially Pedro, would be glad if they could come to Mexico City and see but one thing. Benito would choose to let them see the Alameda, but I would choose to let it be the castle at Chapultepec with the barracks and the cadets."

CHAPTER XX

JUAN'S LETTER

It was morning at the hacienda. The birds sang their merriest and the flowers bloomed their brightest; but loneliness and longing for the boys who were gone filled the hearts of the boys who remained.

They gathered listlessly and only when the absent ones were mentioned did their faces brighten into the old cheerfulness.

Pedro fixed his eyes upon the mountains in something of Manuel's old way, moving only when Juan spoke after a long silence. "If we but knew the way, we might walk to Mexico City and see it for ourselves," he said.

"I, for one, care nothing for Mexico City, but for Manuel and Benito, without whom the city must be a poor place," said Pedro.

"An earthquake might have opened the ground and swallowed them, for all that we have heard of them since they went away," grumbled José.

The rest of the band agreed with him, sure that whatever of splendor or greatness lay upon the city

was there because Manuel and Benito shed it from their own radiance.

"The overseer who took them away will be back to-day," said Juan. "He has been on a long journey to the north and has just returned through Mexico City."

"Stupid, why did you not tell us before?" cried Pedro. "Let us go to the station. We will meet the train and hear what he has to say."

But it was a long time before they could get the overseer to themselves. There were many things for him to tell Don Felipe before he had leisure for the boys. At last he stood before them and took a letter from his pocket. "Will you read it, Juan?" he asked politely, holding it toward him.

But Juan waved it away discreetly. "I kiss your hand, Señor," he said, "pray read it yourself."

So the overseer opened it, and read: —

"*Vamonos, Juan! Vamonos, All!*

"This is from Manuel in Mexico City, and also from Benito, for what is the use of two letters when there is but one thing to say?

"Señor Gabriel is to write it. And who is Señor Gabriel? Ah, that is the wonderful thing. It is as wonderful as if a star should fall from the sky. We

always thought wonderful things would happen on the other side of the mountain, and we were right. But when one is in the habit of expecting the stars to fall, the surprise is not so great when it really happens.

"Manuel has found a father! And this father is Señor Gabriel! And it does not seem wonderful any longer, but as if it might always have been so, yet he will always be a wonderful man, because he has been a famous matador. Now, are you not surprised?

"And he is going to take us to the hacienda that we may once again see the coffee trees with their red berries shining through the leaves, and hear if the hacienda birds sing more sweetly than they do here in the city.

"And most wonderful of all, you are all to come back with us and see for yourselves the many new things that happen here all day long. And there is no need to think of centavos. Señor Gabriel cannot need any of yours because he has plenty of his own, and he will take care of everything.

"*Adios.*"

Twice did the overseer have to read the letter through before the boys seemed to understand its meaning. Then a mighty shout rose from them all.

"What is all the noise about?" asked old Juana of little Pepita.

"It is from Manuel's band," answered the child. "They are shouting with joy because it is promised to them that they shall go over the mountains and see what it is like in Manuel's land."

VOCABULARY

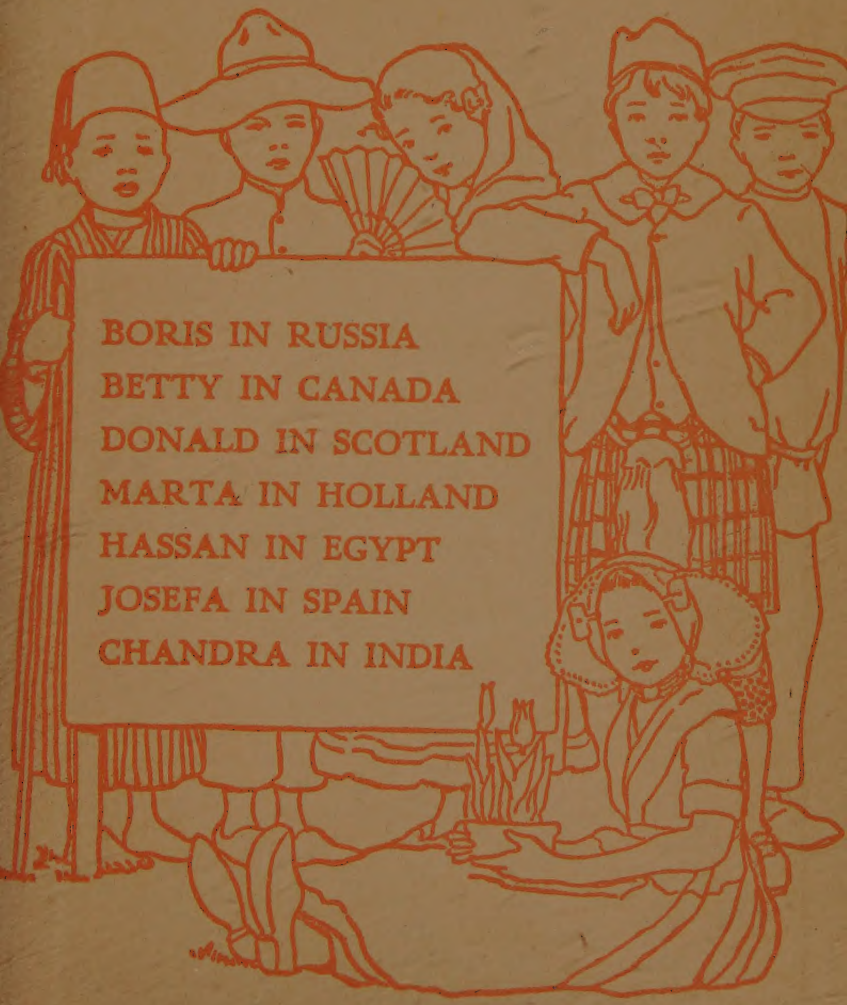
a do be (ȧ dō′ bȧ̆), unburnt brick dried in the sun.
a di os (ä dē′ ōs), good-bye.
Al a me da (ä lä mä′ dȧ̆), a park in Mexico City.
al gua cil (ăl gwȧ̆ zēl′), the officer who opens a bull-fight.
A me ca me ca (ä mä cȧ̆ mä′ cȧ̆), a town in Mexico.
Az tec (ăz′ tĕk), an Indian race that inhabited Mexico at the time of the Spanish conquest.
Be ni to (bā nē′ tō), a boy's name.
Be ni to Juar ez (bā nē′ tō hōō ä′ rĕth), a full-blooded Indian, elected president of Mexico in 1861.
bu̇r′ rō, a donkey.
bu̇r′ rō cor ri do (cŏr rē′ dō), the Mexican game of leap-frog.
buen os (bōō ān′ ōs), good.
ca ne la (cä nä′ lȧ̆), a word used in a Mexican "counting out" verse.
cär gä dōr′, a man who carries freight or express bundles.
cä′ sä, house, dwelling.
cen ta vo (thĕn tä′ vō), a cent.
Chăl′ cō, a lake near Mexico City.
Cha pul te pec (chä pōōl′ tȧ̆ pĕk), a fortified hill near Mexico City.
Cor tez (kôr′ tĕz), a Spaniard who conquered Mexico.
di as (dē′ äs), day.
Di az (dē′ äth), a Mexican surname.
dō′ lȧ̆, a word used in a Mexican "counting out" verse.
Dŏn, a title meaning Sir, Mr.
Dŏn′ nȧ̆, a title meaning Madam, Mrs.

Fe li pe (fā lē′ pā), a man's name.
fi es ta (fē ās′ tä), feast, festivity.
fri jo les (frē hō′ lĕs), beans.
Ga bri el (gä′ brē ĕl), a man's name.
Go mez (gō′ měth), a surname.
gri to (grē′ tō), Mexican declaration of independence.
hä çēn dä′ dō (ä thān dä′ dō), the owner of a hacienda.
ha ci en da (ä thē ăn′ dä), a cultivated farm, a large estate.
has ta (äs′ tä), until.
Hi dal go (ē däl′ gō), the first leader of the Mexican war for independence.
Hu li ta (hōō lē′ tä), a woman's name.
I tur bi de (ē tēr bē′ dā), a Mexican revolutionist, afterward emperor of Mexico.
Ixtlilxochitl (ēst lēl hō chēt′ l), a Mexican prince, born about 1500.
Ix tac ci huatl (ēs täk sē′ hwätl), a volcano in Mexico.
Jo sé (hō zā′), a man's name.
Ju an (hōō ăn′), John.
Ju an a (hōō ăn′ ä), a girl's name.
Juar ez (hōō ä′ rĕth), a surname.
La Vi ga (lä vē′ gä), a canal in the City of Mexico.
le pe ro (lā pā′ rō), a worthless fellow.
Lu is (lōō ē′), a man's name.
mag uey (măg′ wā), a cactus, the century plant.
Man u el (măn′ ōō āl), a boy's name.
Man u el i to (măn ōō āl ē′ tō), little Manuel.
ma ta dor (mä tä dōr′), the man who kills the bull in a bullfight.
Mi guel (mē gĕl′), a man's name.
Mit la (mēt′ lä), a group of ruins in the state of Oaxaca.
Mon te zu ma (mŏn tā zōō′ mä), a war chief of ancient Mexico.
mu cha cho (mōō chä′ chō), boy.
Na ci mi en to (nä thē mē ăn′ tō), birth, nativity.
na gual (nä′ gōōäl).

nōn, no.
Oa xa ca (wä hä′ kä), a state in Mexico.
pa ti o (pä′ tē ō), court, open space in front of or enclosed by a house.
Pe dro (pā′ drō), a boy's name.
pe on (pā′ ōn), a Mexican Indian of the lower class.
pe so (pā′ sō), a Mexican dollar worth fifty cents of our money.
Pe pi ta (pā pē′ tå), a girl's name.
piñ a ta (pēn yä′ tå), a Christmas toy.
pla za (plä′ thå), a square, a market place.
Pō pō′ căt å pētl, a volcano in Mexico.
Por fi ri o Di az (pŏr fē′ rē ō dē′ äth), a president of Mexico.
pō sä′dā, a Mexican Christmas festivity.
Pueb la (pwĕb′ lä), a state and city in Mexico.
pul que (pụl′ kå), a Mexican liquor.
re bo so (rå bō′ sō), a covering for the head worn by Mexican women.
Sa cra Mon te (sä crå Mŏn′ tå), a hill in Mexico.
Sal til lo (säl tē′ yō), a city in Mexico.
Sän′ chō, a name.
San ta An i ta (sän′ tå än ē′ tå), a town in Mexico.
se ñor (så nyôr′), Sir, Mister.
se ño ra (så nyô′ rà), Lady, Madam, Mrs.
se ra pe (så rä′ på), a blanket or shawl.
si (sē), yes.
som bre ro (sŏm brā′ rō), a broad-brimmed Mexican hat.
te la (tā′ lå), a word used in a Mexican "counting out" verse.
Tex co co (tās kō′ kō), a lake near Mexico City.
Tlax ca la (tläs kä′ lå), a state in Mexico.
tor til la (tŏr tē̄ē′ yä), a pancake made of Indian corn, mashed and baked on an earthen pan.
u na (ů′ nā), a word used in a Mexican "counting out" verse.

LITTLE·PEOPLE

EVERYWHERE


BORIS IN RUSSIA
BETTY IN CANADA
DONALD IN SCOTLAND
MARTA IN HOLLAND
HASSAN IN EGYPT
JOSEFA IN SPAIN
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